

BECOMING DIVINE: AUTHENTIC HUMAN BEING

A Thesis submitted to the
College of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts
in the Department of Philosophy
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon

by
Gladys Winifred Neufeld

© Copyright Gladys Winifred Neufeld, August 2003.
All rights reserved.

PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for a Postgraduate degree from the University of Saskatchewan, I agree that the Libraries of this University may make it freely available for inspection. I further agree that permission for copying of this thesis in any manner, in whole or in part, for scholarly purposes may be granted by the professor or professors who supervised my thesis work or, in their absence, by the Head of the Department or the Dean of the College in which my thesis work was done. It is understood that any copying or publication or use of this thesis or parts thereof for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission. It is also understood that due recognition shall be given to me and to the University of Saskatchewan in any scholarly use which may be made of any material in my thesis.

Requests for permission to copy or to make other use of material in this thesis in whole or part should be addressed to:

Head of the Department of Philosophy
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Saskatchewan S7N 5A5

ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the major thoughts on anthropology and selfhood from Plotinus in the third century and the Cappadocians in the fourth, situating the anthropology of the Cappadocians in the much broader context of their culture and their major works. It argues that:

- i) The inherent unity of all things, intelligible and material, provides the basis for radically intuitive categories such as synchronicity, telepathy, and even love.
- ii) The ontological essence of expressed particularity in the divine or the human is an *ekstatic* relationship, i.e., it involves the transcending of the boundaries of self, a self identified as *hypostasis* or person.
- iii) Truth consists in apprehending that true being alone possesses existence in its own nature, participated in by all without being lessened and knowable only as and in relationship. Human being is participation in existence by an experience of communion.
- iv) The most essential activity of historical self is to use one's inherent capacity to create to form one's own identity in relation to the other – both external and within – as incarnational and dialogic beings.

The findings of this thesis are that the relational notion of authentic human being grounded in open-ended divinity provides both a useful framework and the distinctive characteristics of human beingness for rethinking what it means to be a human being in the twenty-first century.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to recognize those who contributed valuable help and insight and made this thesis possible. Thank you to my thesis supervisor and Ancient Philosophy professor, Kevin Corrigan. You wrote on my heart in your lectures and caused me to fall in love with the Beautiful and the Good. Your unfailing kindness and affirmation allowed me to take my courage in hand, say a prayer, and continue writing. I extend heartfelt gratitude to my long-time mentor and Eastern Christianity professor, Myroslaw Tataryn. The hours we spent dialoguing about early Christian thinkers are among the most fruitful of my life. Your patience in saying the same thing six different ways as I struggled with complicated philosophic concepts and your firm support on many levels empower me to believe in myself. Both of these authentic human beings went far beyond their prescribed roles to enable the completion of this project and I am most grateful to them. Thank you to my Advisory Committee, Carl Still and David Crossley, for your efforts to accommodate my schedule, for your constructive comments, and for rallying around me at a critical time. Thanks especially, Carl, for supervising the revisions. Thank you also to the folks in the Philosophy Department, who took me in under a wing and were most gracious, and to the College of Graduate Studies and Research, who awarded a generous scholarship. Finally, thanks to Clayton Beish, for encouraging me to be dialogic and existential with regard to what I was writing and for providing vital computer support in various ways.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PERMISSION TO USE	i
ABSTRACT	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE: PLOTINUS	
1.1 The Neoplatonic Setting	5
1.2 Intelligible Universe	6
1.3 Relation to Human Being	7
1.4 Matter	10
1.5 Self-determination	11
1.6 Community of Being	13
1.7 Mystical Union	15
1.8 Consequent Lifestyle	16
1.9 Conclusion	17
CHAPTER TWO: BASIL OF CAESAREA	
2.1 The Christian Setting	19
2.2 The Uncreated/created Dichotomy	20
2.3 Apophatic Methodology	25
2.4 <i>Hypostasis</i> : Historic Innovation	25
2.5 Communion	29
2.6 Contrast between <i>Theologia & Oikonomia</i>	30
2.7 Knowable Divine Persons	31
2.8 Anthropology	36
2.8.1 Mind as Image	36
2.8.2 Training	38
2.9 Vision of God	45
2.10 Effectual Monasticism	47
2.11 Implications	50
2.12 Conclusion	55
CHAPTER THREE: GREGORY OF NYSSA	
3.1 An Existential Being	57
3.2 On the Making of Human Being	58

3.3	The Ascent of Virtue	70
3.3.1	The Light: Natural Reason	71
3.3.2	The Cloud: The Holy Spirit	75
3.3.3	The Darkness: Going Beyond Oneself	76
3.4	Conclusion	82
CHAPTER FOUR: MACRINA		
4.1	A Life of Excellence	84
4.2	Divine Being & Created World	86
4.3	Human Being as Microcosm	88
4.4	Mind-Soul vs. Sensations-Emotions-Passions	89
4.5	Evil & the Fall	94
4.6	Death of the Body	96
4.7	Purgation	97
4.8	Divinization of Human Nature	98
4.9	Resurrection (<i>anastasis</i>)	100
4.10	<i>Apokatastasis</i>	105
4.11	Macrina's Death	106
4.12	Conclusion	107
CHAPTER FIVE: GREGORY NAZIANZUS		
5.1	Life & Times	110
5.2	God as Trinity	112
5.3	Paradigmatic Categories	114
5.4	Human Nature	119
5.5	The Conflict	120
5.6	Faith as the Fulfillment of Reason	121
5.7	The Transformation of Human Nature	122
5.8	Conclusion	124
CONCLUSION		126
BIBLIOGRAPHY		131

INTRODUCTION

One of the most complex debates in contemporary thought concerns the concept of person and the definition of personhood. The most basic of underlying assumptions about this notion become fluid upon examination. At the heart of the matter is the bold question: Is it possible to find a single expression of the essential nature of person sufficient in the face of the wide diversity of contexts in which the term is used?

Most often legal or ethical considerations are primary in the discussions relating to person. The questions at issue bear upon the rights of, or obligations owed by, a specific individual entity and generally reflect a concern for the protection of the interests and well-being of individuals. Only in this past century has the concept of person been expanded to include women. Contemporary challenges include issues such as euthanasia, the indiscriminate use of life-support technology, the rights of the unborn, reasonable boundaries for biomedical research and tissue transplant, and moral obligations owed to “natural plant or animal species, populations, and ecosystems, that are threatened by human activities.”¹

Another starting point in examining the notion could be its psycho-metaphysical connections. Criteria such as “agency, self-consciousness, sociability, and the capacity to shape one’s own life”² would then be used to construct a cognitive definition of person. The questions raised could relate to issues of ability such as the stage of rational development when a person acquires moral majority with all its inherent rights and obligations, or how mind and self-consciousness relate to personhood.

Contemporary philosophers add yet another dimension of complexities to the debate by asking, What sort of relationship exists between philosophical statements on the principle of person and the common use of the word, which is taken to mean

¹ Mary Anne Warren, *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3.

² Christopher Gill, *The Person and The Human Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 3.

“individual human being”?³ How do ancient discussions on the meaning of being human relate to modern concepts? Is a species-neutral formula required? If so, then do recent formulations encapsulate the traits we find distinctive in human beings or do they identify a “universally valid set of characteristics”⁴ that can be applied to all persons? At times, philosophers have identified part of “the problem of person as being ‘that of understanding what we ourselves essentially are.’”⁵ Certainly, all the considerations outlined above are based on the belief that being a person entails more than mere biological human life. But how do we pinpoint what the ‘more’ is?

The question of personhood is also explored in modern eastern Christian thought, as evidenced by writers such as John D. Zizioulas (1931-) and Christos Yannaras (1935-).⁶ They explicitly root their understanding of what it means to be person in a relational concept that emerged in the third and fourth centuries, from the works of four Cappadocian writers who lived in a Neoplatonic culture and accepted an intimate and intrinsic correlation between cosmology and anthropology. Ancient philosophy for both pagans and Christians was an “all-embracing activity concerned with everything relevant to the realization of the ultimate purpose of human life.”⁷ It was interested in embodying truth and “becoming ‘wise’ in the fullest and truest sense of the word.”⁸ Based on the highest goal of Greek life – the fulfilment of the Delphic command ‘Know Yourself’ – it was a task whose object was “to attain our true end, union with the Good, in the divine All, by knowing our true self and its place in reality.”⁹ In essence, the human vocation

³ Gill, *Person*, 3.

⁴ Gill, *Person*, 4.

⁵ Harry Frankfurt, “Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person,” *Journal of Philosophy* 68 (1971): 6, quoted by Gill, *Person*, 5.

⁶ John D. (Jean) Zizioulas is Metropolitan of Pergamon, representative of the ecumenical patriarchate, and formerly professor of Theology at Glasgow University and Kings College, London, as well as at University of Thessalonica. He has published numerous journal articles as well as the major publication *Being as Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993). Christos Yannaras (Chrestos Giannaras) is professor of Philosophy at Panteios Institute, Athens, and a prominent Greek lay-theologian, noted for his attempts to express Orthodox truths in the language of modern philosophy. He has published countless articles and some twenty books. His major English language publication is *The Freedom of Morality*, translated by Elizabeth Briere (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993).

⁷ R.A. Markus, “Marius Victorinus and Augustine,” Part 5 in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 344.

⁸ Jaroslav Pelikan, *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 180.

⁹ A.H. Armstrong, “Plotinus,” Part 3 in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*, ed. A.H. Armstrong (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 228.

was understood as a dynamic, all-encompassing spirituality,¹⁰ dependent on active relationship with the other, both divine and human.

Plotinus is well known for his extensive and comprehensive reorientation in the third century of the whole of classical philosophy. Also tremendously influential in the historical development of European thought are the fourth-century Cappadocians, who breathed the air of Neoplatonism: Basil of Caesarea, a monastic and ecclesial administrator who theoretically heads the group; his younger brother Gregory of Nyssa, the mystic thinker; his older sister Macrina, a clear representative of Greek spirituality; and his friend Gregory of Nazianzus, known as “the master of oratory.”¹¹ Although their attitude toward much of classical philosophy is best characterized as “ambivalent identification,”¹² their dialectical inquiries arguably built a bridge between classical Greek thought and medieval Byzantium, laying the foundation for much of later European culture.¹³

As we shall see, all five of these thinkers were firmly persuaded that the originator of truth and wisdom, the transcendent uncreated, was far beyond the understanding of humans. All contributed to a growing body of literature that insisted on the use of apophatic¹⁴ language when speaking of divine essence, thus introducing an element of skepticism into their thought. Yet they also emphasized an infinite, ineffable, inconceivable, invisible divine being intimately participated in by existential human being. Holding these two paradoxical elements in tension, they developed a new understanding of how we know our ‘true end’ in terms of how we relate to others. “Ontological being” is the term I shall use for the capacity of relational divine being to be participated in by creation without change or diminution. Humans have an innate ability to approach ontological being by voluntarily participating in divine being, in a process

¹⁰ A.H. Armstrong, “Plotinus,” 223.

¹¹ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 7-8.

¹² Pelikan, *Christianity*, 17.

¹³ John D. Zizioulas, “The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution,” in *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*, ed. Christoph Schwobel, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), 45.

¹⁴ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 40 - 41. The language of apophaticism provided description by negation rather than by affirmation. Both Classical and Patristic Greek made extensive use of the alpha privative as the prefix of negation, e.g., *pathos* means to be subject to the experience of change in time and space, while *apatheia* means immutability or not being susceptible to the changes that arise from existence in time and space. According to Gregory Nyssa in *Eunomious* 2.142-44, “words formed on the alpha privative denoted ‘the absence of noninherent qualities rather than the presence of inherent qualities.’ ”

known as divinization or deification. In contrast to ontological being, identity for humans is the inherent and distinguishing characteristic of an existential individual, as constituted by the limitations of matter within time and space.

The aim of this study is to demonstrate that, in the particular patristic tradition being presented, person is for both divinity and humanity a relational term denoting the particularity of self as expressed ecstatically in friendship and communion rather than as isolated in fragmented individuation. I will argue that, for humans, personhood is best defined as authentic human being, restored to wholeness by participation in ontological being and shaped by a paradigm of love and concern for the other. As I will show, the Cappadocian tradition regarded the true vocation of humans as to actually become divine through communion with ecstatic divine persons. The review of this tradition will present the central historic texts and allow the authors to speak for themselves as they explicate an understanding of self not common in contemporary usage. The writings of Plotinus will provide the background of Neoplatonic thought while the Cappadocians will help us understand the Trinitarian and Christological layers built on that foundation. Precisely because their view of person is relational and to be realized in lived experience, I will also situate my topic in each figure's life and more general thought, to illustrate how each strove to existentially live this personal-relational mode of being in the greater community.

CHAPTER ONE: PLOTINUS c. 205 – 278

1.1 The Neoplatonic Setting

As stated in the Introduction, Plotinus is significant for this thesis in terms of providing the milieu for thinkers in late antiquity. The culture of the time was generally deeply sympathetic to the “assumption that Platonic ideas provided a good background for an appropriate way of life.”¹⁵ The works of classical philosophers had established the cultural paradigms for an investigation of the meaning and purpose of human life. While it is a matter of debate exactly how familiar the Cappadocians were with Plotinus’ writings, it is easy to show that as serious students of philosophy they had extensive knowledge of the same categories and concepts he dealt with. Quite naturally then, their thoughts took shape within these familiar cultural forms. Throughout my paper, I will demonstrate how Plotinus and the Cappadocians reach very similar anthropological conclusions.

Very little is known of Plotinus’ early life. According to Porphyry’s biographical information, Plotinus never divulged the secrets of his parentage or his birthplace. It is often assumed that he began life in Egypt, since it is known that he studied philosophy for eleven years in Alexandria under the master, Ammonius. It is also clear that he arrived in Rome in 263, where he taught philosophy and established a circle of friends and disciples, among them his editor, Porphyry. Plotinus is depicted as a close associate of aristocrats and senators, a disinterested provider of service to friends and tutor to their children, a conscientious arbitrator in disputes and, always, an avowed advocate of withdrawal from this world.¹⁶

How does a philosophy which espouses such a withdrawal actually manage to provide a vibrant and organic anthropology? Of the fifty-four works Plotinus wrote over

¹⁵ Henry Chadwick, “Philosophical Tradition and the Self,” in *Late Antiquity: a Guide to the Postclassical World*, ed. G.W. Bowerstock, et al. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 61.

¹⁶ Armstrong, “Plotinus,” 195-203, supplied biographical data.

the course of his lifetime, I shall pick out only those elements that are directly germane to my topic. We will see that the dimension of relationship with the other, both divine and human, is what brings intensity and health to life, allowing for authentic human being.

1.2 Intelligible Universe

Fundamental to Plotinus' conception of the human are the three subordinated *hypostases* of the intelligible universe, Soul, Intellect, and the One,¹⁷ for whom intra-connectedness is a criterion.¹⁸ Soul (*psyche*) is basic real existence (*hypostasis/ousia*) which inhabits both the world of intelligibles, where Intellect is its source and organizing principle, and the sensible matter (*hyle*, Aristotle's word for matter) of creation; in essence it is all-soul, a unifying force that animates, organizes, and connects all things. "Soul is many and one,"¹⁹ i.e., "an indivisible unity"²⁰ whose nature it is nevertheless to be divided²¹ into "a multiplicity of powers: thought, imagination, perception, etc."²² Yet even the divisible part remains "indivisibly divided"²³ because soul remains a unified whole in every part of creation in which it is present.²⁴ As the beneficent intermediary between the intelligible and the sensible worlds, all-soul sympathetically²⁵ cares for the whole of physical creation in the form of world soul,²⁶ the older "sister"²⁷ of descended individual souls.

¹⁷ Plotinus, trans. A.H. Armstrong, 7 vols. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), Enn. V, 1 (10) 10, 1-5. Kevin Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: a practical introduction to Neoplatonism* (forthcoming), 26, translates *hypostasis* in Enn. V, 1 (10) 6, 31-39 as "surrounding reality directed to what is outside of them." Plotinus' examples are fire generating heat and snow transferring cold.

¹⁸ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus* (forthcoming), 82.

¹⁹ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, Enn. VI, 9 (9) 1, 39-44, page 23. "The soul then brings the one to others
"

²⁰ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 23.

²¹ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, IV, 2 (1). Soul is divided by virtue of being attached to bodies in space, but remains essentially one "in the cosmos which is eternity."

²² Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 22.

²³ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, IV, 2 (1) 20, age 38.

²⁴ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, IV, 2 (1) 20-22.

²⁵ John Rist, "Plotinus and Christian philosophy," in *The Cambridge Companion To Plotinus*, ed. Lloyd P. Gerson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 390, states: "Plotinus also built the Stoic notion of the 'sympathy' of the physical cosmos into his third 'hypostasis,' which he called Soul."

²⁶ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 36.

²⁷ Plotinus, trans. Armstrong, IV, 3 (27) 6, 14.

Intellect (*nous*) is the immediate, living contemplation of the One; it is non-rational and irreducible omnipresence whose actuality is derived directly from the One. Since it entails subject and object, it can be thought of as intelligible diversity in unity, as an unfolding activity of different moments such as Being-Life-Intellect or in terms of the five . . . intelligible categories, . . . being, rest, sameness, otherness, motion, which are each distinct and yet interwoven with one another.²⁸

The One is reality beyond being,²⁹ unity beyond the grasp of human intellection, yet the most fundamental and the most infinite presence in the universe. Plotinus says his “will is the same as his existence (*hypostasis*),” since he is “what he himself willed to be.”³⁰ Also named The Good as the “pre-eminent source of all positive attributes,”³¹ the One creates not out of necessity, nor by the instinct of an unthinking principle, nor as by choosing among possible options, but by a “free spontaneous” overflow of his own goodness. It is the originaive principle of multiplicity – a spring, as it were,³² from which all things pour forth as emanations in a non-spatial but hierarchically descending procession.³³ Since the One is source/cause (*aitia*) and principle (*logos*) of real being, all things reflect their own creative potential only as they take their being from source, as they “rest within”³⁴ and participate in “immediate intimacy”³⁵ with the divine.

1.3 Relation to Human Being

Because he clearly understands the One as both the source and the goal of all being, Plotinus asks this most basic question in his meditations: how do we as human beings experience the One? He provides his own answer: “Just as in nature there are

²⁸ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 34-35.

²⁹ *Plotinus*, trans. Armstrong, V, 2 (11) 1, 5-10.

³⁰ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, VI, 8 (39) 13, 53-59, page 24.

³¹ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 24.

³² Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, III, 8 (30) 9 & 10. Plotinus describes the One as “a power for all things.” It is an immaterial or spiritual principle described here hypermetaphorically in the language of potency rather than actuality, giving “all of itself” without being consumed; it “remains quietly itself.” This relates directly to the definition of ontology used in the thesis introduction. Compare n. 34.

³³ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, V, 2 (11) 1, 7-18, pages 25-26.

³⁴ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, III, 8 (30) 10. In translating V, 1 (10) 6, 31-39, page 26, “And all things as long as they remain in themselves, necessarily produce from their own substance out of the power which is present, a surrounding reality directed to what is outside of them, . . .” Corrigan explains that “all real beings are productive and give of themselves without being diminished.”

³⁵ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 26.

these three . . . so we should think that these are also present in us,”³⁶ yet independent of all bodily constraints. Inasmuch as the Intelligible All is “a single total fact”³⁷ (yet able to extend its immediacy by unfolding and succession in time and space) and “Complete Living Form . . . which includes the total of living things,”³⁸ the human “*qua* Being, living Being, is in the intelligible.”³⁹ Every historical human soul is essentially part of the living reality situated in the transcendent world, and as such, “contains its cause within itself.”⁴⁰ We are able to be human only by virtue of the fact that we contain the three hypostases within us.

Yet only as the soul descends into the sensible world does it become able to unpack this inherent potential experientially. It is as if the innate curiosity and creativity of soul move it to voluntarily go walk-about or rock wall climbing or mountain bike touring for awhile,⁴¹ testing its own inner resources and exploring the rich vitality available to it, in order to animate itself as an image of intelligibility. The experience of embodiment can thus be a positive, life enriching process that activates the integrity soul already possesses and communicates meaning through a body; the downside is that the process is also fraught with possibilities involving risk and danger.⁴²

Inasmuch as it is in soul’s nature to be divided, she divides indivisibly⁴³ even as soul descends. The higher soul remains in the intelligible world and, as the ontological

³⁶ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, V, 1 (10) 10, 6.

³⁷ Plotinus, *The Enneads*, trans. Stephen MacKenna (New York: Larson Publications, 1992), VI, 7 (38) 1, 57.

³⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, VI, 6 (34) 15, 1-15.

³⁹ Gerard J. P. O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy of the Self* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973), 32.

⁴⁰ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 33, quoting Enn. VI.7 (38) 1, 57. In context, the quote relates to the All. However, as O’Daly shows in unpacking the treatise, Plotinus reaches the point where the saying also applies to *logos pepoieikos* -- the creative power constitutive of human being: “historical human existence is willed, by a good soul – it is a realization of essence on a lower level . . . Conversely, the characteristics of such an existence, the *sensibilia* which go to form its totality, are inherent in this essence; in fact, they are an aspect (*logos*) of its activity (*energeia*), and it, being complete, contains them,” 39.

⁴¹ Roff Smith, *Cold Beer and Crocodiles: A Bicycle Journey Into Australia* (Washington DC: Adventure Press, 2000), 254. As he thinks back over the miles and months on the road, Smith ruminates, “maybe one of the more important lessons this journey was teaching me was the answer to Einstein’s great philosophical question: Is it a friendly universe?” Apparently, for Plotinus, the possibility of becoming mates with unknown others while challenging oneself physically and smelling the wattle in a newly discovered part of the cosmos holds real appeal also to souls. In descent, as the beginning of their education, they must uncover how the physical world is connected to intelligibility.

⁴² The soul’s natural curiosity can lead it into situations where it is overwhelmed by what it sees or experiences and is left with nothing to hang onto. Yet the risk seems to be inherent in and critical to the process of developing mature reflection.

⁴³ Compare n. 19-24.

principle of human excellence, contains all the virtues as well as all the ethical faculties of individuality and freedom that constitute the truest self.⁴⁴ It comes to be present to the body while remaining greater than the embodied soul, not giving of itself completely, not allowing itself to be possessed, but providing the illumination by which the compound apprehends intelligibility.⁴⁵ The lower soul is both an image (*eidolon*)⁴⁶ of its own transcendent self (higher soul) and the cause of immediate human existence, in that it wraps itself around matter and “comes to be in bodies,” as embodied souls.⁴⁷ Yet it retains “a capacity for the divine by reason of its kinship and identical substance (*homoousion*) with the divine.”⁴⁸ For Plotinus, this identity of substance is critically important for it means that, as the human soul increasingly chooses to embrace virtue and wisdom, i.e., divine attributes, it increasingly demonstrates its growing divinization. The point he is making is that, in conjunction with body, by the use of reason and memory, lower soul links sense perceptions⁴⁹ to the judging functions of higher soul, thus enabling the communication of the intelligible meaning inherent within it. The self of historical process is thus that which it makes itself to be⁵⁰ as it enters into a dialogue with and embraces its forming principle (*logos*),⁵¹ which is both “the creative, constitutive power of soul” (*energeia*) and “the transcendent vehicle of the intelligible.”⁵² Thus “we (*hemeis*)”⁵³ becomes Plotinus’ original way to identify the self as inclusive of the two, “a god with another conjoined lower power”⁵⁴ that exists in historical process and is determined by the choices it makes as it moves “between its own deficiency and [its]

⁴⁴ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 40, working from V, 3 (49), 1 f, and I, 1 (53).

⁴⁵ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, I, 1 (53) 7 and I, 1 (53) 12, with commentary page 60 f.

⁴⁶ *Plotinus*, trans. Armstrong, IV, 3 (27) 27, 7 and IV, 4 (28) 18, 7.

⁴⁷ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, IV, 2 (1) 10.

⁴⁸ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 52. Note the emphasis here, by comparing with *homoiousion* or “of similar substance.”

⁴⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, VI, 7 (38) 5.

⁵⁰ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 22.

⁵¹ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 128, describes *logoi* as “active unified expressions of pure intelligibility which we come to understand by rational, discursive means, but [which] are not rationally discursive in themselves.”

⁵² O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 59 & 60.

⁵³ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 20-21, explains that Plotinus himself coined the term for the self on the assumption that “‘we’ are separate entities, who think and act ‘for ourselves.’” On 25, O’Daly states that ‘we’ is the combination of transcendent and existential soul. Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 41, states that this is one of Plotinus’ favourite words for the self.

⁵⁴ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 26.

longing for communion with the intelligible.”⁵⁵ And although it may seem as though the greater oneness of soul could compromise individuality by essentially interrelating all human being, Plotinus sees no such danger -- since the soul is a ‘one and many,’ it can readily differentiate and accommodate a variety of experience⁵⁶ while retaining psychic cohesion.⁵⁷ He maintains that each soul is formed according to the object of its own vision.⁵⁸ Yet herein lies one of the great dangers for the soul on walkabout, i.e., it is entirely possible for it either to abandon its true reflective nature (through loss of integrity or trust) or to choose an improper focus of contemplation (due to ingratitude or resentment), both of which lead to disaster (lostness) for souls.

1.4 Matter

While its generation is good in that it is originated with the One and contains traces of the divine, matter’s inherent “indeterminacy is such that it is potentially everything, while actually being no one thing.”⁵⁹ Subject to change and flux, its nature of “no-thingness”⁶⁰ can move upward when governed by a forming principle which activates its inherent potential for growth and generation, or downward in the absence of form, toward negation and death. Matter is thus multi-dimensional in Plotinus’ world,⁶¹ determined by its level of participation in intelligible being:⁶² perfectly formed in the intelligible universe where it exists as “whole illuminated substance”;⁶³ positively formed in nature or in bodies ordered in varying degrees by an organizing principle, communicating meaning as the physical manifestation of psychic energy; but negative in its lowest form, where it exists as “absolute indefiniteness”⁶⁴ or “indeterminate plurality characterized by privation or absence of form.”⁶⁵

⁵⁵ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 30.

⁵⁶ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, IV, 9 (8) 2, page 37.

⁵⁷ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 24.

⁵⁸ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, VI, 7 (38) 7, 13-15. Compare O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 38 – “forms itself after that towards which it tends.”

⁵⁹ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 131.

⁶⁰ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 67.

⁶¹ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 133.

⁶² Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 43-44.

⁶³ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, II, 4 (12) 5, 22-23, page 133.

⁶⁴ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, III, 4 (15) 1, 1-12, page 43.

⁶⁵ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 131.

And here lies another great danger for the embodied soul. Indefinite matter acts as a gravitational field for souls, intensifying the movement of descent, cramping soul in such a way as to limit her power as she becomes more and more consumed by bodily concerns or emotions,⁶⁶ more and more concerned with mere ego gratification. “Wishing to belong to themselves,”⁶⁷ these degenerate souls withdraw from essential unity with source and with counterparts and ‘fall’ into ignorance of source and self. They choose a shadowy existence as an “ensouled body” rather than as an “embodied soul” (*eidolon*),⁶⁸ effectively embracing non-being and negation in their fragmented isolation. Caught in matter’s trap, they ultimately form a kind of black hole that tends to suck in other undisciplined souls. Yet for Plotinus it always remains possible for soul to re-invent itself, even if it has already fallen into “the mud,”⁶⁹ i.e., matter characterized by indefiniteness and privation.

1.5 Self-determination

As an intelligible universe containing every possible manifestation of life, soul creates various life-giving forms in human bodies: the sensitive form (*aesthetikon*) makes perception possible, the vegetative form (*phutikon*) nurtures and grows and enables reproduction, and the reasoning form (*logikon*) is intended to knit the external world to the internal. Soul is responsible for all the faculties of human being; all interpenetrate and collaborate together to form the soul-body compound. A healthy compound will use reason as its guiding principle, with the sensitive and vegetative functions as corollaries, for, Plotinus says, “human being is co-extensive with the rational . . . active operations of soul.”⁷⁰ Inasmuch as a human self is the philosophical organ in which reason and opinion reside, in which the external world is knit to the inner, self is soul.⁷¹ Plotinus’ normative definition of self is the “free power of determination,”⁷² free not in the sense of choosing between good and evil (for evil is the absence of good and not a ‘thing’ in itself), but free

⁶⁶ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, I, 8 (51) 14, 40-48, page 44.

⁶⁷ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, V, 1 (10) 1, 1-10, page 44.

⁶⁸ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 29.

⁶⁹ *Plotinus*, trans. Armstrong, I, 8 (51) 13, 25.

⁷⁰ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, I, 1 (53) 7, 23-24.

⁷¹ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 49.

⁷² O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 41.

to choose consciously the best ways to realize its potential intelligibility and to make manifest interconnectedness and virtue/wisdom.

In contrast to the integral self-sufficiency of the One, human existence with its derivative status must actually first choose and then continually strive to discover itself, in and through the rest of the world.⁷³ And although reason is a kind of deficiency when compared with the immediacy and wholeness of Intellect (*nous*), it is enormously important as the primary tool by which humans engage in “the task of learning the number and nature of their parts, . . . their very principle, and what constitutes their real selves.”⁷⁴ Self-knowledge for a human is a corollary of self-possession; it involves the conscious self and the unconscious self working in unison in a movement of return into the inner depths of personal and real being, where intelligible self-knowledge is reflected. It is in contemplation of Intellect resident within that soul is able to be present to itself, to apprehend meaning, and to act spontaneously. Here, gazing steadfastly at Intellect, soul sculpts the “dialogical and inclusive”⁷⁵ dimensions of its own multiple powers, until it reflects the beauty of the One and becomes an *authentic human being*. In a famous text, Plotinus instructs us:

Withdraw into yourself and look. And if you do not find yourself beautiful yet, act as does the creator of a statue that is to be made beautiful: he cuts away here, he smooths there, he makes this line lighter, this other purer, until a lovely face has grown upon his work. So do you also: cut away all that is excessive, straighten all that is crooked, bring light to all that is overcast, labour to make all one glow of beauty and never cease chiselling your statue, until there shall shine out on you from it the godlike splendour of virtue, until you shall see the perfect goodness surely established in the stainless shrine.⁷⁶

When you know that you have become this perfect work, when you are self-gathered in the purity of your being, nothing now remaining that can shatter that inner unity, nothing from without clinging to the *authentic man*, when you find yourself wholly true to your essential nature, wholly that only veritable Light which is not measured by space, not narrowed to any circumscribed form . . . when you perceive that you have grown to this, you are now become very vision.⁷⁷

⁷³ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 91.

⁷⁴ O'Daly, *Plotinus' Philosophy*, 7.

⁷⁵ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 41.

⁷⁶ Compare *Plotinus*, trans. Armstrong, “self-mastery enthroned upon its holy seat” (a reference to *Phaedrus* 254B7).

Plotinus uses a variant of the same image when he further describes sculptor soul, working to manifest its essential humanity, as living gold cleaning “the rust of time” from itself, i.e., purifying itself from all “external accretions” such as irrational desires and passions, so that only “the best things are present in it, wisdom and all the rest of virtue.” These then stand within the embodied soul as “splendid statues,” shining with all the glory of “transcendent realities”; they represent a descended soul transfigured to reflect “what it formerly was”⁷⁸ by means of the disciplines inherent in any gainful walk-about in conjunction with a body.

The whole human person – body and soul – is transformed, not only with reference to an inner structure of being but also in extension, in the activities that it chooses and in its ways of relating to others. The process is not at all that of “depersonalization” into an amorphous blob of intelligibility, but the exact opposite, of “divinization”⁷⁹ by a return to the “real, original self” within.⁸⁰

1.6 Community of Being

Plotinus often thinks of soul in terms of providence, as the whole of the intelligible world present as a dynamic creative force in the physical world. As a protective, enabling, nurturing presence, it sustains and governs the whole of the material world. But its powers are even more imaginative than this, since it also weaves all things together.⁸¹ Plotinus says that what we call nature is itself a soul,⁸² an image of higher soul, whose dim contemplation is weaker than that of higher soul but still includes both the “with-knowing,” a measure of understanding (*synesis*), and the “with-perception” (*synaesthesia*) of soul’s relationship to the other *hypostases*. This latter term was already

⁷⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans MacKenna, I, 6 (1) 9. Armstrong continues, “you have already ascended and need no one to show you; concentrate your gaze and see.”

⁷⁸ Plotinus, trans. Armstrong, IV, 7 (2) 10 & 380-85 n. 1.

⁷⁹ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 53 & 58.

⁸⁰ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 60.

⁸¹ Plotinus, trans. Armstrong, III, 3 (48) 6, 23 f, describes the correspondence (*analogia*) that “holds all things together. . . . They act in the way in which the parts in every living thing work on each other.” Plotinus is talking about the unfolding of an implicate causal connection, about material transmissions springing from soul, allowing for patterns and predictability formed by the sympathy of atoms. According to Corrigan, speaking in class lecture, this concept anticipates what Jung called synchronicity. If all is interconnected in this manner, then there is no difficulty in explaining similar thoughts in widely separated persons or mental images of events prior to their occurrence or seemingly coincidental happenings that occasion unprecedented harmony. See also nn. 104 & 111.

used by Aristotle “to describe the shared consciousness of thought and existence between friends” (*Eth. Nic.* 1170 b 10). Plotinus uses *synaesthesia* as nature’s “common sense,” i.e., its ability to be aware of many different individual sensations while, at the same time, being aware of the “relatedness” between these sensations and the whole of intelligibility.⁸³

So although it may often seem that Plotinus is mainly concerned with the individual soul’s journey back to source, his greater thought consistently places that historical process within the context of soul’s integral unity and the connectedness of the Intelligible All, that is, within what might be called “a community of Being.”⁸⁴ He encourages us to live in a state of constant awareness of the sympathetic connection, in order to actualize the “self-intuition”⁸⁵ (*synaesthesia*) of our own soul. “It is . . . in becoming aware of the infinity of self, its unlimited nature, and in ceasing to separate it from Universal Being, that one ‘advances’ to the latter, i.e., realizes one’s presence in it.”⁸⁶ In a remarkable passage describing a turnabout from individuality, Plotinus tells us that in real being ‘we’ are ‘they’; that whenever and wherever we reach out to intelligible being we do so by recognition of our essential unity with all that is – intelligible and sensible, supernatural and natural, animate and inanimate, rational and irrational – a recognition that gives birth both to an authentic humanity and to a correspondent personal humility.

When we look outside of that on which we depend [for being] we ignore our unity; looking outward we see many faces; look inward and all is the one head . . . Cast [what is alien] aside and there is the All within you . . . not that it has to come and so be present to you; it is you that have turned from it.⁸⁷

Again, this movement into intelligibility should not be seen as “annihilation of the self.”⁸⁸ Rather, the self is more adequately developed by rejecting the tendency to self-

⁸² Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, III, 8 (30) 4, 15-20.

⁸³ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 139. Liddell & Scott translate *aesthesia* as “perception by the senses” and *synaesthanomai* as “to perceive at the same time,” as used by Aristotle. Maurice Balme and Gilbert Lawall, *Athenaze: An Introduction to Ancient Greek*, Book 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 263, translate *aesthanomai* as “I perceive, learn, apprehend.”

⁸⁴ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 61.

⁸⁵ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 138, n. 15, quoting Samuel Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Bollingen Series 75 (Princeton: University Press, 1983) 241-242. “With-perception” and “self-intuition” are both accurate descriptors for *synaesthesia*, since one aspect of perception can be defined as intuitive cognition.

⁸⁶ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 66-67, commenting on VI, 5 (23) 7, 1 and following.

isolation and by accepting its fundamental solidarity with the whole of being: “By the lessening of the alien in you, you increase.”⁸⁹ The self progresses into a more mature fulfilment of ecstatic human being, in that what previously was merely a part has become complete by its receptivity of the whole.⁹⁰ The picture Plotinus uses to illustrate this thought is of a star shining brightly in the night sky, enabling the clear sighting of a great constellation, and making “the whole more beautiful when it has become of greater value by its gain in beauty and order.”⁹¹

1.7 Mystical Union

How do human beings experience the One? Plotinus’ answer remains the same throughout his meditations: by diligently applying the science of being human to themselves. The process begins with recognition of limitations; we turn back to source and see ourselves “as other than the One.”⁹² Yet innately our souls so long for communion with the One that we come to understand, we “cannot exist without it.”⁹³ As we give heed to the insistent desire that impels us onward, in a movement likened to waking up, we become aware of the welcoming divine resident within us. We throw ourselves upon it, grasping hold of it through the resources of our own intelligible soul. We meditate deeply in its company and increasingly, as we trust more completely, we are formed by resting within its goodness and beauty. We take our being from it; we know it as if by the touch of intimate communion.⁹⁴ And as we become more integrated, we increasingly recognize this same presence outside ourselves and we become “one with all”⁹⁵ other “things which exist after it but through it.”⁹⁶

Throughout his treatises, Plotinus uses Greek compound words prefixed with *syn-* (in company with, together with) to describe human communion with the divine. This

⁸⁷ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, VI, 5 (23) 7 & 12.

⁸⁸ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 62.

⁸⁹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, VI, 5 (23) 12.

⁹⁰ O’Daly, *Plotinus’ Philosophy*, 66-67, commenting on VI, 7 (38) 2, 51 f & III, 2 (47) 14, 15 f.

⁹¹ Plotinus, trans. Armstrong, III, 2 (47) 14, 25 f.

⁹² Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 26.

⁹³ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, V, 5 (22) 12, 5-13, page 27.

⁹⁴ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, III, 8 (30) 10, 30 f, paraphrased.

⁹⁵ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, VI, 5 (23) 7.

⁹⁶ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, III, 8 (30) 10.

pervasive emphasis on synergy,⁹⁷ on the working together of the human and the divine in all areas of life, is beautifully illustrated in the following passage.

If you grasp [the One] by removing being from it, you will be amazed. And throwing yourself upon it and attaining to it, take your rest within it and meditate more deeply in company with it [*synnoeo* - to reflect on together], knowing it by a simple contact and by bringing together [*synieimi* - to come together] into one view [*synorao* - to see together] its greatness from the things which exist after it but through it.⁹⁸

But there is also a more mystical union with the divine, which Plotinus can describe from his own experience, as he does in this poignant memory:

Often I have woken up to my self out of the body and entered into myself, outside of other things, seeing a beauty of great wonder and trusting that then above all I belonged to the greater part, activating a best life and coming to identify with the divine, having been seated in it, coming to that actuality, seating myself above every other intelligible object, after that rest in the divine when I come down to reasoning from Intellect, I am at a loss how I ever came down, and how my soul has come to be in the body when she is what she has shown herself to be in herself.⁹⁹

1.8 Consequent Lifestyle

Plotinus typically describes the natural existential result of the mystical experience of union with all in terms of another *syn*-prefixed word: *synousia*. Translated literally, it identifies the essence of human being as ‘to be in company with’; it signifies dialogic communion, spending time together, eating and drinking together, and it indicates cohabitation in a common way of life. His own strong conviction that true human being is found in fellowship led to his attempt to found Platonopolis, an idealistic city of friendship, where each would care for all others as for themselves. It was to be a community based on radical equality, an intersection of the sensible and the suprasensible, to which Plotinus and his associates could retreat. When his plans for this “pagan monastery”¹⁰⁰ failed due to political reasons, he chose to incarnate his beliefs on a more moderate scale. He exemplified contemplation/insight by living “at once within

⁹⁷ H.G. Liddell and R. Scott, *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), 774, establishes that already in Euripides and Aristotle the Greeks used *synergia* to mean joint working together and co-operation, or if used in a pejorative sense, collusion and conspiracy.

⁹⁸ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, III, 8 (30) 10.

⁹⁹ Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, IV, 8 (6) 1, 1-11, page 28. Note that he retains the long, single sentence of Plotinus’ Greek in order to give a sense of the integral unity of the complex thought.

himself and for others;”¹⁰¹ being “good and kindly, singularly gentle and engaging . . . ever striving towards the divine which he loved with all his being.”¹⁰² He typified his strong belief in inter-communion by engaging in philosophic/spiritual exercises with his group of associates, which included a number of Roman senators and their wives, while residing in the household of a woman and her daughter, and by acting as the legal guardian of a number of orphaned children and their property, paying attention to their education, even listening to them recite original compositions of verse. Armstrong concludes, “Like other great contemplatives, he seems to have had the gift of keeping his inner life untroubled by these many outward activities.”¹⁰³

1.9 Conclusion

As we leave Plotinus, let us note again his concept of three integrally intra-connected yet subordinated divine *hypostases*. It will be interesting to see which aspects the Cappadocians retain and which they rearrange to better express the goal of relational being. In particular, anticipate how they will redefine the will of the divine, which remains part of the mystery of divine nature in Plotinus, and make it relevant to the human vocation. Expect them also to refine the application of the principles of *aitia* (cause) and *arche* (source) to divine being.

Plotinus’ notion of selfhood rejects withdrawal into isolation and, instead, emphasizes the inherent unity of all things, intelligible and material, thus providing the basis for all radically intuitive categories such as synchronous events and even love.¹⁰⁴ All things reflect the creative potential of being only when they rest intimately in the ontological cause/source within themselves. The most creative activity of the historical self, therefore, is to be relational, i.e., to form its own identity in relation to the other – both external and within – as essentially dialogic beings. This means that, for Plotinus,

¹⁰⁰ Armstrong, “Plotinus” in *Cambridge History*, 202.

¹⁰¹ Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, 7.

¹⁰² Plotinus, *Enneads*, trans. MacKenna, 17. Unless otherwise noted, all historical data in this section is from “Porphyry’s Life of Plotinus,” 1-21.

¹⁰³ Armstrong, “Plotinus” in *Cambridge History*, 203.

¹⁰⁴ <http://www.merriam-webster.com>, states that, although synchronicity is a relatively modern noun, dating c.1889, the English adjective synchronous (1669) comes from a late Latin term *synchronos* etymologically derived from the classical Greek *syn-* + *chronos*. According to Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 139, the word Aristotle used to describe such intuition was *synaesthesia* (*Eth. Nic.* 1170 b 10); thus we can be certain that the concept was known to Plotinus and the Cappadocians. See nn. 81 & 111.

being authentically human is to be simultaneously closest to the divine while in community with all other beings. This activity, as we have seen, is inherently ethical, practical, and of service to one's fellow humans in very down-to-earth and engaged ways.

Yet while Plotinus' self is clearly a participatory, relational human being, several important anthropological points are not explicit in the texts I have dealt with. How does the soul re-invent itself? Is it by correcting itself to a standard? How exactly does the human participate in the One? The divine-human community hinted at remains a mystery since no living connection is made between human being and *hypostasis*, the term used to describe the divine. Plotinus thus sets out the problems encountered in using cosmology to determine anthropology. The answers are found in the work of the Cappadocians.

CHAPTER TWO: BASIL OF CAESAREA c. 329 – 379

2.1 The Christian Setting

Basil was the first son born into a wealthy family distinguished for its high-minded Christian ideals as proved by their experience of suffering and persecution. His father is reputed to have been an eminent advocate and teacher of rhetoric,¹⁰⁵ his mother a woman of great beauty and exceptional purity. After an early education at Caesarea, Basil continued studying the disciplines of rhetoric and philosophy at Constantinople and then proceeded to the scholarly world of Athens (351 – 356), where he continued his traditional liberal education in literature, rhetoric, and philosophy under the most famous teachers of the time. He integrated what was profitable in secular culture into his outlook, yet his thought is expressed as if shaped by the living experience of ecclesiastical communion, against the backdrop of Judeo-Christian scripture. He became bishop of Caesarea in 370, a strong champion of Orthodox doctrine, and the celebrated Doctor of the Church, ‘Basil the Great.’¹⁰⁶

In this chapter, I shall situate Basil’s anthropology in the larger context of his thought by concentrating on two of his major works, *Hexaemeron* and *De Spiritu Sancto*, and out of his extensive correspondence, *Letter 233* and *Letter 38*.¹⁰⁷ From these writings I develop an extensive exegesis of the Cappadocian view of God as pertinent to

¹⁰⁵ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 16, identifies rhetoric as “the common property of Classical and of Christian culture” and, on 13-14, as the unique vehicle of classical Greek language and way of thought.

¹⁰⁶ David Farmer, *Oxford Dictionary of Saints* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 42-3, and Basil, *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 8 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), xiii – xxxii, provide biographical information.

¹⁰⁷ In *Basil: Letters and Select Works*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 8 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1995). Unless otherwise stated, all quotes from Cappadocian primary sources are from this series. I recognize that it is outdated and that problems exist with the translation, but it remains the current standard translation into English. Where outdated English exists, I have modernized the text, e.g., changed “worketh” to “works”, “thee” to “you”, etc., except for passages from scripture.

human being, an introduction to the constitution of the human, a model for living authentically as a human, and some implications of this theory of personhood.

2.2 The Uncreated/created Dichotomy

Basil's idea of God bears direct relation to his anthropology, as we will see later in the chapter. It also has considerable correspondence with Plotinian thought, as evidenced throughout his *Hexaemeron*, a series of Lenten sermons on creation.¹⁰⁸ Basil begins by identifying God as the "intelligent cause [that] presided at the birth of the Universe" (1.2, 53a). Further informed by his aristocratic Athenian education, he describes the Creator as

beneficent Nature, Goodness without measure, a worthy object of love for all beings endowed with reason, the beauty the most to be desired, the origin of all that exists, the source of life, intellectual light, impenetrable wisdom . . .
(1.2,53b).

The awe-full greatness of the name of the uncreated is made clear by Basil's statement of earnest desire to prepare a lesson worthy of the idea of God, and further underscored throughout the initial sections of the *Hexaemeron* by numerous insertions: "In the beginning God created."¹⁰⁹

Prior to the work of creating the world and outside of the limits of time, this "Creator and Demiurge of the universe" exercised "eternal and infinite . . . supernatural powers" in forming an "orderly arrangement of pure intelligences who are beyond the reach of our minds and of whom we cannot even discover the names" (1.5,54b). The

¹⁰⁸ Throughout the *Hexaemeron*, Basil remains the equivalent of a modern day Teilhard de Chardin or Annie Dillard. Basil said, "I want creation to penetrate you with so much admiration that everywhere, wherever you may be, the least plant may bring to you the clear remembrance of the Creator. . . . A single plant, a blade of grass is sufficient to occupy all your intelligence . . ." (5.2-3). Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 8, says, "Unless all ages and races of men have been deluded by the same mass hypnotist (who?), there seems to be such a thing as beauty, a grace wholly gratuitous. . . . The answer must be, I think, that beauty and grace are performed whether or not we will sense them. The least we can do is try to be there."

¹⁰⁹ John Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1972): 417-418. *Creatio ex nihilo*, the beginning, became fundamental in Greek theology to eliminate a divine presence (*parousia*) causally determined by the given reality. With this principle they ensured no distance (*diastema*) between God and creation and no contradiction between presence and absence in God. Use of pre-existent matter could lead, as it does in human art, to God's presence contained within things in the space-time structure (pantheism) and allow for God to be caught in the predicament of spatio-temporal creatures, where presence is always conditioned by absence.

essence of this “invisible and intellectual world” is created beings intended as “spiritual light for the happiness of those who love the Lord” (1.5,54b). One gets a clear sense of Basil setting up an intermediary contemplative world much like Plotinus did, which acts as illumination for humanity, as a focus for vision and an aid in understanding.

Elsewhere Basil speaks of this creation as angels with “reasonable natures,” whose perfection “is sanctification and the continuance in it” (DSS 16.38,23b). Although the sanctification is “external to their substance” (24a), it “superinduces their perfection” through communion with God. And if they “are perfect from the moment of creation” (24b), this “blessed life” is possible only because they abide “in the good and true, and while they retain their freedom of will, never fall away from their patient attendance on Him who is truly good” (24a). They ceaselessly hold the “face” of God in their vision, who “confers on them the grace that flows from Him for the completion and perfection of their essence” (16.39,25a). The “happiness” (*Prolegomena*, *Homily 4*, lxii) of these angelic beings indicates the sheer bliss that arises from constant communion with the source of goodness and alludes to the human goal.

Basil then provides exegesis of the movement of God known as “the beginning.” It entails the creation of a visible world, the idea of time that arises concomitantly with the existence of the world, and the creature of time characterized by mutability (*pathos*).

[I]t was necessary to add a new world, both a school and training place where the souls of men should be taught and a home for beings destined to be born and to die. Thus was created, of a nature analogous to that of this world and the animals and plants which live thereon, the succession of time, for ever pressing on and passing away and never stopping in its course. Is not this the nature of time, where the past is no more, the future does not exist, and the present escapes before being recognised? And such also is the nature of the creature which lives in time, – condemned to grow or to perish without rest and without certain stability (1.5,54b).

Plotinus described creation as a free spontaneous overflow of goodness from the One, like a fountain or spring pouring forth emanations. Basil differs from Plotinus when he makes it clear that God’s involvement in this creation is not as “involuntary cause” (1.7,56a) but as a work of purpose that discloses its true end – “at the will (*bouleisis*) of God the world arose in less than an instant” (1.6,55b) as a work of “production” (1.7,55b, cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* v.i). As in all “creative arts” (1.7,55b), the work shows an

“industrious intelligence” (1.7,55b) that produces admiration for the worker in the mind of the viewer. “The world is a work of art displayed for the beholding of all people; to make them know Him who created it” (1.7, 5b). What qualities of God are knowable from his work? “Being good, He made it an useful work. Being wise, He made it everything that was most beautiful. Being powerful He made it very great” (1.7,56a, cf. Plato *Timaeus*). Basil speaks of “the finger of the supreme artisan taking possession of the substance of the universe, forming the different parts in one perfect accord, and making a harmonious symphony result from the whole” (1.7,56a). But he doesn’t think of matter as existing beforehand, i.e., as uncreated material for which the Artisan merely supplied the form. He says,

God, before all those things which now attract our notice existed, after casting about in His mind and determining to bring into being that which had no being, imagined the world such as it ought to be, and created matter in harmony with the form which He wished to give it. He assigned to the heavens the nature adapted for the heavens, and gave to the earth an essence in accordance with its form. He formed, as He wished, fire, air and water, and gave to each the essence which the object of its existence required (2.2,60a).

The nature of matter is such that, as Basil has already noted, creatures within time are subject to continual change or mutability (*pathos*, 1.5,54b). In agreement with Plotinus, he also suggests the indeterminacy of matter in his recommendation:

Do not let us seek for any nature devoid of qualities by the condition of its existence, but let us know that all the phenomena with which we see it clothed regard the conditions of its existence and complete its essence. Try to take away by reason each of the qualities it possesses, and you will arrive at nothing. Take away black, cold, weight, density, the qualities which concern taste, in one word all these which we see in it, and the substance vanishes (1.8,56b, cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* vii.3).

Yet there are distinct benefits available to those who choose to profit from the sensible world. “And God saw that it was good” (cf. Genesis 1.10); not merely aesthetically pleasing, but when contemplating “the beauty of His works . . . in His ineffable wisdom,” God was aware of “the purpose of the work which makes the goodness” (4.6,75a). It

was not conceived by chance and without reason, but for an useful end and for the great advantage of all beings, since it is really the school where reasonable souls exercise themselves, the training ground where they learn to know God; since by

the sight of visible and sensible things the mind is led, as by a hand, to the contemplation of invisible things (1.6,55a-b).

The great underlying purpose of God's art is for humans to use creation to fulfil their vocation, that of raising themselves "by visible things to the invisible Being" (6.1,82a).

Let us glorify the supreme Artificer for all that was wisely and skillfully made; by the beauty of visible things let us raise ourselves to Him who is above all beauty; by the grandeur of bodies, sensible and limited in their nature, let us conceive of the infinite Being whose immensity and omnipotence surpass all the efforts of the imagination (1.11,58b).

The origin of humanity is as

formed of earth, but the work of God's hands; . . . inferior [to animals with greater brute strength] as regards natural advantages, but, thanks to the privilege of reason, capable of raising yourself to heaven (6.1,82a).

Throughout his creation homilies, Basil presents humanity as a special creation, "honoured with reason" (7.5,93a) and distinguished by royal dignity, since "man was created in the image of God, and . . . shares this resemblance" (9.6,107a). Natural reason indeed forms the basis of Basil's image arguments, as in: "There has been implanted in us natural reason which tells us to identify ourselves with good, and to avoid all that is harmful" (7.5,93a); and, "Reason is the distinctive faculty of man, and the word man serves to designate the being gifted with this faculty" (4.5,74b). In comparison to other terrestrial animals,

Man, a celestial growth, rises superior to them as much by the [upright] mould of his bodily conformation as by the dignity of his soul. . . . Thy head, O man! is turned towards heaven; thy eyes look up. Thou art called to . . . noble cares . . . Raise thy soul above the earth; . . . fix thy conversation in heaven. Thy true country is the heavenly Jerusalem . . . (9.2,102b).

It is because of the faculty of reason that "virtues exist in us also by nature, and the soul has affinity with them not by education, but by nature herself" (9.4,103b). Created likeness to God, "that which is in you a gift of grace" (9.6,107a), existent in humanity by the will of God, has huge anthropological implications for Basil. It means that by nature, to be authentically human is to participate in the glory, wisdom, justice, immortality, goodness, in short, all the excellence (*arete*, virtue) of the uncreated.

In opposition to the virtue inherent in goodness and established as the goal for humanity, evil has no origin in God. Why not? Basil answers, simply “because the contrary cannot proceed from its contrary. Life does not engender death; darkness is not the origin of light; sickness is not the maker of health” (2.4,61b). Yet no one can deny the existence of evil in the created world, so “from whence comes its nature?” Basil agrees with Plotinus, there is no “original nature of wickedness” (2.5,61b). “Evil is not a living animated essence; it is the condition of the soul opposed to virtue (*koros*), developed in the careless on account of their falling away from good” (2.4,61b).¹¹⁰ His advice on where to find the source is, “Do not then go beyond yourself to seek for evil” (2.5,61b), for “each of us . . . is the first author of his own vice” (2.5,62a); and, “You are the master of your actions. Do not look for the guiding cause beyond yourself, but recognise that evil, rightly so called, has no other origin than our voluntary falls” (2.5,62a). However, he does qualify:

Sickness, poverty, obscurity, death, finally all human afflictions, ought not to be ranked as evils; since we do not count among the greatest boons things which are their opposites. Among these afflictions, some are the effect of nature, others have obviously been for many a source of advantage (2.5,62a).

The final act of creation was when God united his works into one comprehensive whole characterized by mutuality and a radical interdependence.

He wielded all the diverse parts of the universe by links of indissoluble attachment and established between them so perfect a fellowship and harmony that the most distant, in spite of their distance, appeared united in one universal sympathy (2.2,60a).¹¹¹

This theme of the essential unity and inter-connectedness of all is familiar from Plotinian thought, where it was termed ‘community of being.’

¹¹⁰ Anthony Meredith, *The Cappadocians* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1995), 122, says Basil’s use of *koros* follows Origen’s argument of satiated or bored souls who turn away due to God’s inability to satisfy completely the finite spirit, a notion rejected by the two Gregory’s. My understanding of Basil leads me to suggest that he uses *koros* to mean “the insolent consequence of satiety” (the phrase “the insolence of satiety” is also found in Macrina’s *DAR* 450b), thus placing the emphasis on the inattention of human will rather than on any possibility of divine finitude.

¹¹¹ Maureen Latta, “Being Part of the ‘Conscious Evolution,’” *Wholife* 8 (2002): 30, reflects on experiments in quantum physics, such as the one in 1982 at the University of Paris in which photons ‘communicated’ non-locally, which have led to the modern theory that the universe is indeed holographic, part of a deeper order of existence with a sympathetic “attachment” throughout. See nn. 81 and 104.

2.3 Apophatic Methodology

Plotinus, in speaking of divine essence, declared it “truly ineffable. . . . We can say nothing of it: we only try, as far as possible, to make signs to ourselves about it.” He adds further clarification with the comment, “For we say what it is not, but we do not say what it is: so that we speak about it from what comes after it.”¹¹² Basil is in complete agreement with this conclusion. The *Hexaemeron* goes on to discuss the human limitations involved in moving into the contemplation of God that he has recommended as the purpose and goal of creation, readily identifying that “language is powerless to express [even] what the mind conceives” (2.1,58b). How then can it begin to convey what the mind cannot conceive of, i.e., the complete otherness of uncreated divine nature? A fundamental principle in Basil’s work is that the human mind can comprehend neither the realization of divine unity nor its absolute simplicity; it remains “inexpressible by the human voice” and “incomprehensible to human reason.”¹¹³ Contrast is the only linguistic approach possible when relating divine nature to human categories, so Basil customarily uses alpha privatives to say what it is not, e.g., *arretos* (ineffable/inexpressible), *aggenetos* (unbegotten), *aphthartos/athanatos* (immortal/incorruptible), *aionios/aidios* (everlasting/ eternal), *aoratos/atheatos* (invisible / unseen), *ameres* (indivisible), *apathes* (impassible/not subject to corruptibility with the passage of time), etc. The inability of mind to comprehend divine essence points us directly toward the problem of skepticism. If humans are unable to understand divine mind, how will we unravel the purpose of creation, how will we know our own intended end? Basil and the Cappadocians had a unique solution to the problem.

2.4 *Hypostasis*: Historic Innovation

Basil’s understanding of ontological being is pervaded by the historically innovative distinction the Cappadocians made between *ousia* and *hypostasis*. Prior to their work, the meaning of *hypostasis* had always and everywhere been identical to that of *ousia/substantia*, defined as real existence, essence, the nature of a being. This is how

¹¹² Plotinus, trans. Armstrong, 117, trans. Enn. V.3 (49) 13, 1-6 and 14, 7-8. Cf. Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus*, 104, trans. Enn. III.8 (30) 10, 29-30: “. . . yet it is of such a kind – though nothing can be predicated of it, not being, not substance, not life – as to be that which is beyond all of them.”

¹¹³ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 42, translating and quoting Basil’s *Hexaemeron* 2.2, 60a.

Plotinus used the terms, as “the highest ontological category to indicate that something is and at the same time is itself, and not something else.”¹¹⁴ *Ousia* as applicable to the uncreated divine was therefore necessarily static and impassible and completely unknowable by created beings. Christians had agreed upon the term *homoousios* (shared essence, what is held in common) to declare the divinity of Jesus as Son of God, but this was essentially a negative statement meant to affirm status as uncreated.¹¹⁵ The enormously significant accomplishment of the Cappadocians was to appropriate the term *prosopon*, which customarily had been used to mean ‘a mask’ as in a theatrical production or in affected behaviour consistent with social norms, and adapt it to mean the unique properties of one particular manifestation of *ousia*,¹¹⁶ thus identifying “the idea of person with that of *hypostasis*.”¹¹⁷

Letter 38, written to his brother Gregory,¹¹⁸ clarifies the distinction between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, as Basil uses the terms. *Ousia* is “the indefinite conception of the essence or substance,” of a “general and uncircumscribed” nature (3,138a). *Hypostasis* is that which “gives standing and circumscription” (138a) to an expressed peculiarity of essence. Basil explains the concept of person in terms of what can be known by observing the realm of humanity. Paraphrasing the text, his analogy is as follows. When we say ‘human’, we understand a certain commonality of nature among plural subjects, a sharing of the same essence and substance (*ousia*) but in a rather indefinite and intangible form. If we wish to give the form more definition, we confine our expression of human nature to one subject, for example, Peter. This specificity is not a limitation of nature; rather, it is the potency of nature as expressed in a particular mode of existence by the naming of that which “stands under” it / supports it from beneath / provides its foundation – the

¹¹⁴ John D. Zizioulas, “The Teaching of the 2nd Ecumenical Council On the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective,” in *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum* (Vatican: Libreria Editria, 1983), 32.

¹¹⁵ Established as orthodox theology at the first Ecumenical Council at Nicaea in 325.

¹¹⁶ John D. Zizioulas. *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church* (Crestwood: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1993), 31-34.

¹¹⁷ Zizioulas, “Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,” 47.

¹¹⁸ *Basil: Letters*, ed. Schaff and Wace, 137, n. 1, state that this letter is also included among the works of Gregory of Nyssa, as addressed to his brother Bp. Peter of Sebaste; however it was referred to as Basil’s at the fourth Ecumenical Council at Chalcedon in 451.

person (*hypostasis*, 3,137-8). Now apply the analogy to divine being.¹¹⁹ All three *hypostases*/persons share the same uncreated and incomprehensible nature existing in each with no degree of variation since “in them is seen a certain communion indissoluble and continuous” (4,139a). Yet within this “community of essence” (5,140a) there exist “notes of differentiation” (3,138a) which require us to make a separation, to note the particular as unique and distinct amongst the common. Here Basil speaks as in a riddle of person and divine nature, describing their co-existent relationship as “conjoined separation and separated conjunction” (4,139b). His conviction that divine nature is transcendent and can be spoken of only in apophatic terminology leads him to carefully state that what he is presenting is “at best a token and reflexion of the truth [and] not the actual truth itself” (5,139b). Yet even in creation there are observable objects that illustrate the argument. (Here he is following his own advice, as outlined previously from the *Hexaemeron*, using creation to understand what is beyond it.) In the radiant brilliance of the rainbow we see light “both continuous and divided;” colour “steeped in the variegated bright tints of its dye” yet

imperceptibly abstracting from our vision . . . with the result that no space, mixing or parting . . . can be discerned either between blue and flame-coloured, or between flame-coloured and red, or between red and amber. For all the rays, seen at the same time, are far shining, and while they give no signs of their mutual combination, are incapable of being tested, so that it is impossible to discover the limits of the flame-coloured or of the emerald portion of the light, and at what point each originates before it appears as it does in glory . . . As then in the token we clearly distinguish the difference of the colours and yet it is impossible for us to apprehend by our senses any interval between them, so in like manner conclude . . . that the peculiar properties of the hypostases, like colours seen in the Iris, flash their brightness on each of the persons whom we believe to exist in the Holy Trinity (5,140a).

The importance of the characteristic association of *hypostasis* and *prosopon* in Cappadocian thought cannot be overstated for either cosmology or anthropology. It effected several significant philosophical shifts: first, it established the ultimate ontological category of the divine to be personhood, i.e., the causal principle (*aitia*)

¹¹⁹ Zizioulas, “Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,” 48-9, points out that following Basil’s argument to this point, it is possible to logically conclude three gods. However Basil immediately underscores that, unlike existential human being in which nature is prior to person, God is eternal and therefore the one divine nature is not logically prior to the three persons. Zizioulas explains that in God they coincide in “a way of being that precludes individualism and separation as a criterion of multiplicity” (49).

becomes personal and purposeful, introducing freedom as an ontological concept; second, it permitted a more dynamic and fluid divine *ousia*, freed from any logical necessity including that of its own existence, since divine person freely wills/causes unknowable *ousia*/existence in a movement of *ekstasis*, i.e., communion is now constitutive of particularity of being, making the term ‘self-existent’ to be antithetical; third, it precluded subordinationism within the triune Godhead by defending the integrity of each *hypostasis* in the divine *monarchia*,¹²⁰ i.e., each becomes “the bearer of its nature in its totality”¹²¹ in a unique and unrepeatable mode of existence; and fourth, it allowed for an ability on the part of created being, if also personal, to have intimate relationship with the uncreated.¹²²

This innovation takes philosophical reason and weds it to revelation of the divine *hypostases* as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, with the result that God’s being can be logically constituted by the freedom of *kenotic* love which transcends the boundaries of ‘self.’¹²³ Relationship rather than necessity now forms the basis of *hypostasis*, giving the term a rather different connotation than Plotinus’ notion of an impersonal spring (*arche*) overflowing naturally and revealing the mystery of how divine-human communion is possible.

Similarly, as Basil will demonstrate in the section on anthropology (2.8), we anticipate the implication for the human to be that, although as creature s/he cannot escape the necessity of existence, i.e., biological human being is constituted by created nature/*ousia*, yet, as created in the image of God, the human has the “hope of becoming an authentic person,”¹²⁴ i.e., a being who transcends self by freely willing communion.

¹²⁰ Zizioulas, “2nd Ecumenical Council,” 39. In speaking of Basil’s doxological argument, Zizioulas says, “the three persons of the Trinity appear to be equal in honour and placed one next to the other without hierarchical distinction, almost as if the Monarchy of the Father itself were an irrelevant matter.” Zizioulas here seems to encapsulate Basil’s emphasis precisely, for although the Father, acting intentionally, remains the original principle, Basil deliberately ascribes the *monarchia* to the Triune Godhead and not exclusively to the Father. Compare *De Spiritu Sancto* 18.45, where the king’s image is given ALL the majesty and glory, sovereignty and authority of the king, so the subject of the doxology can remain but one. Compare also 18.47, where “the natural Goodness and inherent Holiness and the royal Dignity extend from the Father through the Only-begotten to the Spirit. Thus there is both acknowledgment of the hypostases and the true dogma of the Monarchy is not lost.”

¹²¹ Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Human Incapacity,” 408.

¹²² Zizioulas, “Doctrine of the Holy Trinity,” 47-49, provides a synopsis of this innovation.

¹²³ Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Human Incapacity,” 408.

2.5 Communion

On the basis of this new meaning for *hypostasis*, Basil confidently asserts that there is one cataphatic statement that can be made about divine *ousia*: the unity is constituted by continually choosing relationship, by the free fellowship of community. He provides abundant descriptions of this *koinonia* of nature in his treatise, *De Spiritu Sancto*.¹²⁵ In speaking of the unity of the Father and the Son, he says,

Worshipping as we do God of God, we both confess the distinction of the Persons and at the same time abide by the Monarchy. We do not fritter away the theology in a divided plurality because one Form, so to say united in the invariableness of the Godhead, is beheld in God the Father, and in God the Only begotten. For the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son; since such as is the latter, such is the former, and such as is the former, such is the latter; and herein is the Unity. So that according to the distinction of persons, both are one and one, and according to the *community of nature*, one (18.45.19f, italics mine throughout).

Elsewhere he includes the Spirit as well: “But the Spirit is ranked together with God . . . on account of the *natural fellowship*; is not dragged in by us, but invited by the Lord” (13.30.29-31). Basil again uses an artistic example to clarify: while art may imitate that which it represents, the Son is by nature the image of whom he presents, and thus

the honour paid to the image passes on to the prototype. . . . As in works of art the likeness is dependent on the form, so in the case of the divine and uncompounded nature *the union consists in the communion* of the Godhead (18.45.34).

Basil further justifies his use of ‘with’ (*syn*) in the formula for liturgical doxologies¹²⁶ on the basis that

the proof it contains of the *eternal fellowship and uninterrupted conjunction* is excellent. For to say that the Son is with the Father is to exhibit at once the distinction of the hypostases, and the *inseparability of the fellowship*. . . . The same thing is observable even in mere human matters . . . [for] the preposition “with” declares in some sense as well the *communion in action* (25.59.83f).

He continues the argument for an intra-Trinitarian person-nature relationship similar to that of heat in fire or life in soul, summarizing as follows:

¹²⁴ Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 44.

¹²⁵ Basil’s treatise *DSS* is formatted as an argument about the wording of the doxology.

¹²⁶ Zizioulas, “Teaching of the 2nd Ecumenical Council,” 40.

For absolute and real co-existence is predicated in the case of things which are mutually inseparable . . . It follows that wherever the *fellowship is intimate, congenital (symphueis), and inseparable*, the word ‘with’ is more expressive, suggesting as it does, the idea of *inseparable fellowship* (26.63.16f).

For Basil, “natural communion” (18.46.1) constitutes the “essential existence” (26.63.11) of divinity, which cannot be conceived of without “titles expressive of eternal conjunction” (26.63.14). Thus the names Father, Son, and Holy Spirit reveal personal divine being; not by disclosing uncreated and incomprehensible divine nature *per se*, but by the “proper peculiarity” (*Letter 38*, 139a) of the “all-embracing” nature (*DSS* 23.54), expressed in persons who can be known by the continuity and community of their inter-relating.

The distinguishing marks that Basil considers proper to each personalized *hypostasis* are: the Father as existence without generation or origination, derivation “from no cause” (*Letter 38*, 139a), “original cause” (*DSS* 16.38), “cause of the cause of all things” (*Letter 38*, 138b), the “sole will” behind the existence of all things (*DSS* 16.38); the Son as only-begotten of the Father, “creative cause” (*DSS* 16.38), “first impetus of divine intelligence” (*Hex* 3.2, 65b), “Originator and Cause” of all things, bringing them “from non-being into being” (*Letter 38*, 138b); the Spirit as procession from the Father (*Letter 38*, 138b), “perfecting cause” (*DSS* 16.38), the source and supplier of all good things to creation.

2.6 Contrast between *Theologia* and *Oikonomia*¹²⁷

Basil’s treatise *De Spiritu Sancto* contains another dialectic, expressed within the doxological argument and useful in speaking of how humans relate to knowable divine persons. He uses a distinction¹²⁸ between *theologia* (5.12.1,7b), i.e., what we can say about God’s immanent being as it exists in itself, which must remain “Nothing” to protect God’s uncreated transcendence, and *oikonomia* (8.18,12b), i.e., what we can say about God’s operations in history (16.37,23a). An early and prominent (probably Alexandrian) doxology addressed to God the Father continued “through the Son in the Holy Spirit”

¹²⁷ This distinction is the basis of the essence-energy debate, classical in Orthodox theology from the time of Gregory Palamas (c. 1296-1359).

¹²⁸ *Basil: Letters*, ed. Schaff & Wace, 7, n. 2, explains that the distinction was already common in patristic usage before the Cappadocians.

(1.3,3a). Basil says this expression is entirely appropriate when giving thanks for God's action in and towards the world (7.16,10b). But he justifies his use of "with the Son together with the Holy Spirit" (1.3,3a) by claiming this presentation is just as ancient (7.16,10b) and actually more theologically appropriate when speaking of the intradivine union. "'With him' expresses equality of dignity, while 'through him' denotes subordination" (6.13,8a. Compare with 7.16,10b; 8.17,11b; 10.24-26,16-17.), which is why Basil prefers 'with.' Now when discussing how humans know the One God, using what is available through economy, we generally begin with the work of the Holy Spirit and proceed through the Son to the Father (16.37,23b; 18.47,29b). When speaking of God's transcendent unity, although nothing can be said except that each person exists in a different mode of being (cf. *Letter* 38.3,139a), the initiative begins with the Father, passes through the Son, and reaches us in the Holy Spirit (16.38,23b; 18.47,29b). Two main points will emerge from the contrast, as developed below: first, wherever one begins from, one ends up with the "co-presence and co-existence of all the three Persons at once"¹²⁹ (*perichoreisis*, e.g., 19.49,30b; cf. *Letter* 38.4,139b); and second, in the economy the divine operations are "indivisible but not undifferentiated"¹³⁰ (16.37-38,23a-b).

2.7 Knowable Divine Persons

To begin the investigation into how divine person relates to human being in the divine operations, we must begin from *oikonomia* and ask: What is the mode of being of the Holy Spirit whose operations we can observe? As its "proper and peculiar title" specifies, it is "incorporeal, purely immaterial, and indivisible" (*DSS* 9.22,15a). How does it relate to other persons? Basil answers: as a maternal co-Creator, "it cherished the nature of the waters as one sees a bird cover the eggs with her body and impart to them vital force from her own warmth" (*Hex* 2.6,63a);¹³¹ as ancient forerunner, it brought God's messages to all prophets but particularly announced the Son's coming as a human;

¹²⁹ Zizioulas, "2nd Ecumenical Council," 40.

¹³⁰ Zizioulas, "2nd Ecumenical Council," 39, n. 30.

¹³¹ Basil apparently has no knowledge of male birds which brood eggs, such as black swans, petrels, ratite birds, etc. Perhaps the most famous example is the Emperor penguin who incubates the egg by unceasingly carrying it on his feet for up to three months, covering it with a flap of abdominal skin to maintain egg temperature around 95 degrees F while outside temperatures dip to minus 95 F. He survives the Antarctic

as co-presence, it remained with the Son throughout the Incarnation (*DSS* 6.39,25a); as “the breath” of God’s mouth, “the Spirit of truth which proceeds from the Father,” it constitutes the Body of Christ, the church made up of God’s adopted children (*DSS* 16.38,24a, cf. John 15.26). In all these actions, its “peculiar function” is “the revelation of [divine] mysteries” (16.38,24b).

And precisely, “His operations [toward creation], what are they? For majesty ineffable, and for numbers innumerable” (*DSS* 19.49,30b). Basil speaks metaphorically of the Holy Spirit providing light to the eyes of the angelic creation enabling them to “behold the face of the Father which is in heaven” (16.38,24b, cf. Matthew 18.10). Their ability to live in “unspeakable harmony” and “mutual concord” (16.38,24b) comes from having perfected an unwavering vision, which is “preserved by the direction of the Spirit” (16.38,24b). Throughout the writings of the Cappadocians, one finds angelic life portrayed in this way as the epitome of created life, a pre-eminent model for human life.

Basil provides another comprehensive description of the Holy Spirit’s agency and actions toward creation, in terms that sound amazingly like Plotinus’ description of higher soul.¹³²

Think of an intelligent essence, in power infinite, in magnitude unlimited, unmeasured by times or ages, generous of Its good gifts, . . . after whom reach all things that live in virtue, as being watered by Its inspiration and helped on toward their natural and proper end; perfecting all other things, but Itself in nothing lacking; living not as needing restoration, but as Supplier of life; not growing by additions, but straightway full, self-established, omnipresent, origin of sanctification, light perceptible to the mind, supplying, as it were, through Itself, illumination to every faculty in the search for truth; by nature unapproachable, apprehended by reason of goodness, filling all things with Its power, but communicated only to the worthy; not shared in one measure, but distributing Its energy according to “the proportion of faith” (Romans 12.6); in essence simple, in powers various, wholly present in each and being wholly everywhere; impassively divided, shared without loss of ceasing to be entire, after the likeness of the sunbeam, whose kindly light falls on him who enjoys it as though it shone for him alone, . . . enjoyed by all who share It, according to the capacity, not of Its power, but of their nature (*DSS* 9.22,15a-b).

winter of violent blizzards by joining with up to ten thousand other males in a densely packed circle that very slowly revolves in a spiral, allowing each to have a turn at the center and also at the frigid edge. His absent female mate, feeding at sea in preparation for nurturing the chick, generally returns on the very day the chick hatches. Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *The Emperor’s Embrace* (NY: Pocket, 1999), 19-25.

¹³² Note the apophatic and cataphatic phrases and images in this passage, as appropriate for divine nature and personal relationship.

Basil speaks paradoxically of the Spirit's continual presence in each part of creation and, at the same time, of the increased capacity of the purified soul to experience "close relationship with God." The metaphor Basil uses to describe the process of return to source is again familiar from Plotinus. Only after a human "has come back again to his natural beauty, and as it were cleaning the Royal Image and restoring its ancient form, only thus it is possible for him to draw near" and see in him/herself "the image of the invisible" and "the unspeakable beauty of the archetype" (9.22). All the while, the Spirit is the aid that lifts up hearts, holds the weak by the hand, brings to perfection those who are advancing. In the same way as a sunbeam falling on transparent bodies makes them brilliant, the souls where the Spirit dwells become refracted light, sending "their grace to others." They attain "understanding of mysteries, apprehension of what is hidden, . . . heavenly citizenship, . . . joy without end, abiding in God, the being made like to God, and, highest of all, the being made God" (9.23,16a). This is a good description of Basil's idea of authentic human being, which takes place only 'in' the perfecting power of the Spirit.

In the economic Trinity, the mode of being of the Son can be identified as "Creator Word" (*DSS* 8.18,13a), the "efficient Cause" (8.21,15a). While maintaining the essence of his Father without variation of any sort, he acts as a kind of mediator "through" whom all of God's "care and providence" (8.19,13a) for creation become known: "the good things that come from God reach us 'through the Son,' who works in each case with greater speed than speech can utter" (8.19,13a). It is "through Him [that] all things have their continuance and constitution, for He created all things, and metes out to each severally what is necessary for its health and preservation" (*DSS* 5.8,6a).

While Basil considers the Son's creating and sustaining work an important demonstration of God's love, the Incarnation remains its ultimate expression. Nothing

so well sets forth the excellency of His might as that God, being incomprehensible, should have been able, impassibly, through flesh, to have come into close conflict with death, to the end that by His own suffering He might give us the boon of freedom from suffering (8.18,12a).

The Incarnation is the paradigmatic example of the person of the Son acting as mediator, "at one time making the grace of the good gifts pass through from the Father to us, and at

another bringing us to the Father through Himself” (8.17,11a). It provides a concise statement of God’s intentions towards humanity, since this extension of grace comes “because of the riches of His goodness, according to his manifold wisdom” (8.17,11a), making itself known in diverse ways to touch each human at his/her point of need:

Them that have fled for refuge to His ruling care, and through patient endurance have mended their wayward ways, He calls sheep and confesses Himself to be, to them that hear His voice . . . a shepherd. . . . To them that have now reached a higher stage and stand in need of righteous royalty, He is a King (8.17,11b).

When He presents to Himself the blameless soul, not having spot or wrinkle, like a pure maiden, He is called Bridegroom, but whenever He receives one in sore plight . . . healing it in the heavy infirmity of its sins, He is named Physician (8.18,12a).

Those that are confined in the darkness of ignorance He enlightens: for this reason He is true Light. Portioning requital in accordance with the desert of deeds, He judges: for this reason He is righteous Judge. . . . Those that have lapsed from the lofty height of life into sin He raises from their fall: for this reason He is Resurrection. Effectively working by the touch of His power and the will of His goodness He does all things. He shepherds; He enlightens; He nourishes; He heals; He guides; He raises up; He calls into being things that were not; He upholds what has been created (8.19,13a).

[So] Scripture designates Him by innumerable other titles [besides Son], calling Him Shepherd, King, Physician, Bridegroom, Way, Door, Fountain, Bread, Axe, and Rock. And these titles do not set forth His nature, but, as I have remarked, the variety of the effectual working which, out of His tenderheartedness to His own creation, according to the peculiar necessity of each, He bestows upon them that need (8.17,11b).

Perhaps ‘Way’ remains the best descriptor of the Son’s operations toward humanity in Incarnation, for it is ‘through’ the creative cause that Basil says he himself attains re-creation as “a child of God” (*DSS* 10.26,17a), having “put on Christ” (12.28,18a) in baptism.

We understand by Way that advance to perfection which is made stage by stage, and in regular order, through the works of righteousness and the illumination of knowledge; ever longing after what is before, and reaching forth unto those things which remain, until we shall have reached the blessed end, the knowledge of God, which the Lord through Himself bestows on them that have trusted in Him. For our Lord is an essentially good Way . . . to that which is essentially good, to the Father (*DSS* 8.18,12b).

The Incarnation presents the personal face of a relational God to creation. It was the aim of the Son to show the way home; thus he offers himself as the ‘Way,’¹³³ inviting to communion not just person to person but, indeed, without distance and face to face.

The mode of being and operation of the Father remains that of “antecedent Cause” (*DSS* 8.21,15a), the will reflected in all that is done by the other divine persons. Humans know this person by what is willed.

The first principle of existing things is One, creating through the Son and perfecting through the Spirit. The operation of the Father who works all in all is not imperfect, neither is the creating work of the Son incomplete if not perfected by the Spirit. The Father, who creates by His sole will, could not stand in any need of the Son, but nevertheless He wills through the Son; nor could the Son, who works according to the likeness of the Father, need co-operation, but the Son too wills to make perfect through the Spirit (*DSS* 16,38,23b).

The Son obeys the Father’s will, “not in the discharge of any slavish service” (*DSS* 8.19,14a) but rather freely, in “voluntary solicitude working effectually for His own creation in goodness and in pity” (8.18,12b). There is a “transmission of will, like the reflexion of an object in a mirror, passing without note of time from Father to Son” (8.20,14a), for “the goodness of the will, which, being concurrent with the essence, is beheld as like and equal, or rather the same, in the Father as in the Son (8.20,14b).

It is not because He lacks deliberate purpose or power of initiation, nor yet because He has to wait for the preconcerted key-note, that he employs language of this kind [i.e., “as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do”]. His object is to make it plain that His own will is connected in indissoluble union with the Father (8.20,14a).

Once again, the response of the Spirit parallels that of the Son:

thus you might learn that in every operation the Spirit is closely conjoined with, and inseparable from, the Father and the Son. God works the differences of operations, and the Lord the diversities of administrations, but all the while the Holy Spirit is present too of His own will . . . (*DSS* 16.37,23a)

Basil clearly portrays the differentiated persons involved in the indivisible operations, the delight they share in each other, and the joy effected by creation’s response to their actions.

¹³³ Henri J.M. Nouwen, *The Return of the Prodigal Son* (New York: Image, 1992), 87.

For the Father is not regarded from the difference of the operations, by the exhibition of a separate and peculiar energy; for whatsoever things He sees the Father doing, ‘these also doeth the Son likewise;’ but He [Father] enjoys our wonder at all that comes to pass out of the glory which comes to Him from the Only Begotten, rejoicing in the Doer Himself as well as in the greatness of the deeds . . . (DSS 8.18,13b, cf. John 5.19).

It is in this passage that it becomes obvious why the causative divine person can only be designated Father in a patriarchal culture, why every other designation is negotiable but Father must remain fixed, for fatherhood is “the greatest joy and the greatest expression of love”¹³⁴ intuitively and intrinsically conceivable by a human male. Responsibility ultimately lies with the Father, who chooses an all-embracing involvement in the life of every other person, divine and human, and in every part of creation; it is he who protects and nurtures, who instils compassion and care in others by his very being. It is this kind of personal freedom to love that Basil insists upon as the ultimate ontology of God.¹³⁵

2.8 Anthropology

Basil has enunciated what humans can know about God, particularly the *ekstatic* mode of God’s being. As his anthropology is based on his cosmology, any theory of human being must correspond to God’s being. So the project of his anthropology is to set out the ‘how’ of human participation in God.

2.8.1 Mind as Image

Basil begins *Letter 233* by stating his awareness “of the constitution of mankind” (1,273a). He immediately clarifies, in keeping with what has already been established: “The mind is a wonderful thing, and therein we possess that which is after the image of the Creator.” Earlier we saw how Basil identified reason as the unique gift of created human being. Here he expands on the dynamic ability of mind:

¹³⁴ Masson, *Emperor’s Embrace*, 209.

¹³⁵ Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal*, 22 & 111 f, describes the essence of fatherhood as precisely this kind of authoritative compassion and radiant, welcoming joy, depicted eloquently in the embrace in Rembrandt’s painting *Return of the Prodigal Son*.

And the operation of the mind is wonderful; in that, in its perpetual motion, it frequently forms imaginations about things non-existent as though they were existent, and is frequently carried straight to the truth (1,273a).

However, he explains, there are “two faculties” in mind: “the divine and the good, which brings us to the likeness of God,” and the evil “daemons” who draw us away from that end.

In an account that uses soul and mind interchangeably, acting by means of free will to self-determine (1,273a-b),¹³⁶ Basil relates “three operations of the mind” which correspond to “three conditions of life.” First, when mind operates alone, “it contemplates small things, commensurate with itself,” yet is quite able to make proper judgements because of its faculty of natural reason. Operating in this neutral mean, it “has nothing about it either damnable or laudable,” just as occupations like helmsman or physician are not virtuous in and of themselves but “incline in one direction or the other in accordance with the will of those who use them.” Second, when mind “yields to those who deceive it, it nullifies its proper judgement, and is concerned with monstrous fancies” such as setting up wood or gold as objects of worship, as well as committing “adulteries, thefts, idolatries, slanders, strife, passion,” etc. Third, when mind “assents to its diviner part, . . . then, so far as its nature admits, it becomes perceptive of the divine.” Choosing to allow the impregnation of the Spirit, it is capable of beholding “the divine beauty, though only so far as grace imparts and its nature receives.” Elsewhere Basil speaks of the “dignity and height” of the contemplative angels as the aim of every intellectual human soul on its migratory return to source (*Prolegomena*, *Homily 3*, lvi).

It is evident that the third operation is normative for Basil, for “the primary function of our mind is to know one God,” even if we can only “know Him so far as the infinitely great can be known by the very small.” For “the judgment of our mind is given us for the understanding of the truth” and “God is the very truth” (2,273b). So, Basil tells

¹³⁶ Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 121, says Basil “locates the image of God in man rather in the power to control than in any particularly intellectual faculty.” My reading of Basil, particularly his descriptions of the differences between animals and humans in the *Hexaemeron*, leads me to believe that he would hardly identify choices made outside the realm of reason as “control.” Nor would he consider control to be fulfilment of image since that actually requires, in a sense, the disowning of control. Acting as image in Basil’s view requires that will and reason not be isolated in this manner but act in synergy as two inter-related components.

us, God created humans intending relationship and providing the faculties necessary for that purpose. Another text concurs: “What is set before us is, so far as is possible with human nature, to be made like unto God. Now without knowledge there can be no making like; and knowledge is not got without lessons” (*DSS* 1.2,2a-b). What kind of knowing is Basil talking about? He acknowledges that “knowledge is manifold – it involves perception of our Creator, recognition of His wonderful works, observance of His commandments and intimate communion with Him” (*Letter* 135.3,275b). Yet in keeping with what is knowable about God (i.e., persons), in light of the purification required of and chosen by those who would know God, in a liturgical setting, he compares the way humans know God to the familiar knowing of “nuptial embraces.”

The statement that God shall be known from the mercy seat means that He will be known to His worshippers. And the Lord knows them that are His, means that on account of their good works He receives them into intimate communion with Him (*Letter* 135.3,276a).

As in Plotinus, reason generally greatly enhances the knowing vision of loving persons, yet because its very nature involves the limitations of mediation, distance, and partiality, it can be surpassed by the vision of faith that knows by touch. After a discourse on the various theories of pre-Socratic philosophers who pursued cosmic inquiry, Basil can conclude, “at all events let us prefer the simplicity of faith to the demonstrations of reason” (*Hex* 1.10,57b), for “if we raise our eyes towards the omnipotent God,” we will discover that “argument[s] of impossibility” (*Hex* 3.3,66b) are not irreconcilable.

2.8.2 Training

In *De Spiritu Sancto* (15.35-36,21b-22b) Basil sets out the anthropological vocation, shaped by God’s providence as stated in scripture and echoed in the liturgy. As a result of manipulation, the first humans chose the operation of mind that yields to deception. This choice established, by means of the sympathetic connection between all creation, a tendency that was inherited by all subsequent humanity, really a kind of pathology of lostness. But God did not abandon his creation. Rather, “the dispensation of our God and Saviour concerning man is a recall from the fall, and a return from the

alienation caused by disobedience to close communion with God.” How does God accomplish this return? “By” God’s will, “through” the Son, “in” the Spirit, regenerating and restoring the human. The whole experience of the Incarnation is necessary, since the Son lived “the pattern life,” illustrating the perfection that humans imitate in various ways to receive “that old adoption” as image of and children of God.

Regeneration comes about through baptism, when continuity with the old alienated way of life is cut by participation in the “likeness of His death,” resulting in a rebirth into a “second life.” “The water receiving the body as in a tomb figures death, while the Spirit pours in the quickening power, renewing our souls from the deadness of sin unto their original life” (22a). The Spirit effects positional restoration to full communion with God in the moment of resurrection/ascension.

Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all fulness of blessing, both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us . . . beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, we await the full enjoyment (*DSS* 15.36,22b).

Existentially, the task remains to live in the godliness of that reflected “fulness of blessing.” As noted earlier, Basil, like Plotinus, thinks of the sensible world as a place for the training of the human soul. He often speaks of the effect of this training using the imagery of light, e.g., as soul becoming “unclouded by worldly disquietudes” (*Hex* 1.1,52a).

As the following quotations amply demonstrate, Basil considers the body to be of secondary concern in comparison to the soul.

[The moon] presents a striking example of our nature. Nothing is stable in man; here from nothingness he raises himself to perfection; there after having hastened to put forth his strength to attain his full greatness he suddenly is subject to gradual deterioration, and is destroyed by diminution. Thus the sight of the moon, . . . ought to teach us . . . to despise our flesh which is subject to change, and to take care of the soul, for its good is unmoved (*Hex* 6.10,88a-b).

We must not be the slaves of our bodies, except where we are compelled. Our best provision must be for the soul. We ought by means of philosophy to release [the soul] from fellowship with all bodily appetites as we might from a dungeon,

and at the same time make our bodies superior to our appetites. . . . The body is only to be so far regarded as is good for the soul (*Prolegomena, Homily 22*, lxviii-lxix).

The carnal man, who has never trained his mind to contemplation, but rather keeps it buried deep . . . as in mud, is powerless to look up to the spiritual light of the truth. . . . Life [thus] enslaved . . . can no more receive the grace of the Spirit than a weak eye the light of a sunbeam (*DSS 22.53,34b*).

Virgins are “bodies living and enshrining a soul made after the image of God” (*Letter 46.4,151a*).

What should be noted from the above is that the body, as matter, is malleable. It can act as “mud” when enslaved by cravings, keeping the soul trapped and powerless, or it can become a living shrine, a translucent receptacle for a luminous soul. As in Plotinus, it all depends on the choices one makes.

Basil established the parameters for training by outlining four factors fundamental for good choices. The discipline begins with an open mind, receptive to lessons from creation for “truth is always a quarry hard to hunt, and therefore we must look everywhere for its tracks” (*DSS 1.2,2b*). What is the course description? “Wisdom is the science of things both human and divine, and of their causes” (*Prolegomena, Homily 12*, lviii). Or, stated another way, God “is good by nature, . . . the creature on the other hand shares in goodness by choosing the good,” by getting to know “the deep things of God” (*DSS 24.56,36a*). Becoming a student of things divine presupposes the activation of reason and agency, since it involves the firm grasp of apprehension rather than mere mental compliance or physical obedience to what is greater than the self. The goal is always to substantiate or incarnate wisdom. So on what basis will evaluation be made? “For he alone is wise who confirms in [virtuous] act the philosophy which in the rest goes no farther than words. They do but flit like shadows” (*Prolegomena, Homily 22*, lxvii). What sort of philosophy of education will be used? Agreeing with what Plotinus says, the training happens always in a dialogic community. As Basil sees it, “a vine, when observed by an intelligent eye, serves to remind you of your nature” (*Hex 5.6,79a*), teaching that creation functions best as a community. The protective hedge God plants around his vineyard is made up of “a guard of angels.” He provides a supportive trellis in the form of apostles, prophets, and teachers.

He wishes that the claspings of love, like the tendrils of the vine, should attach us to our neighbours and make us rest on them, so that, in our continual aspirations towards heaven, we may imitate these vines, which raise themselves to the tops of the tallest trees (79a).

Even the fig trees, which require a wild fig to grow by their side to be productive, teach that we are not complete in ourselves, but “that we must often borrow, even from those who are strangers to the faith, a certain vigour to show forth good works” (80a). Training in isolation is no more an option for Basil than for Plotinus, since it leaves one vulnerable to the self-deception and egoism that limit growth in excellence.

We have already seen how, for Plotinus, self-knowledge was required as a corollary of the self-possession that owned a resident divine and thus allowed for authentic human being. Basil’s logic requires us to examine ourselves for at least two reasons: the search for ontological being will necessarily begin with what we can see, i.e., created being, and his science of humanity has already established that “the origin and root of sin is what is in our own control and our free will” (*Prolegomena, Homily 9*, lviii). *Homily 3 (Prolegomena, lv)* is written on the subject of self-knowledge and based on the text Deuteronomy 15.9: “Take heed to thyself.” As a wise “Teacher,” the God of liberality gives reason to humans so that through “careful attention and constant exercise,” this aptitude enables us “to discern between the noxious and the wholesome.” For “we are to be diligent guardians” of what we possess, using reason to enhance our being by rightly willing those things that lead to increasing health and wholeness. Two handles are provided for our study of ourselves: observing physical substances, and contemplating invisible ones “with the intellectual faculty of the soul.” In today’s language, these might be re-labelled: building an awareness of our interaction with various other elements of creation, e.g., interpersonal relationships in the global village and/or environmental issues; and paying attention to our inner being, i.e., becoming versed in what might be called inward mobility.¹³⁷ Basil admits that knowing oneself is never easy.

In truth the most difficult of sciences is to know one’s self. Not only the eye, from which nothing outside us escapes, cannot see itself; but our mind, so

¹³⁷ Cf. Philip Yancey, *Soul Survivor* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 311: “He withdrew in order to look inward, to learn how to love God and be loved by God.”

piercing to discover the sins of others, is slow to recognise its own faults. . . . Yet the beholding of heaven and earth does not make us know God better than the attentive study of our being does; I am, says the Prophet, fearfully and wonderfully made; that is to say, in observing myself I have known Thy infinite wisdom (*Hex* 9.6,106a).

For the conscientious, the course of study leads to the ultimate in self-development: the reward of knowing ourselves is knowledge of God. “If we are penetrated by these truths [i.e., that through reason and will we are capable of raising ourselves to heaven], we shall know ourselves, we shall know God . . .” (*Hex* 6.1,82a).

Since “the soul grows like its practices, and is formed and fashioned in accordance with its conduct” (*Prolegomena, Homily* 20,lxv), the Spirit acts to internalize the discipline of training. The Spirit is the schoolmaster of regeneration, teaching “the manner of life” the Son lived,

laying down for us the law of gentleness, of endurance of wrong, of freedom from the defilement that comes of the love of pleasure, and from covetousness, to the end that we may of set purpose win beforehand and achieve all that the life to come of its inherent nature possesses (*DSS* 15.35,22b).

With consideration for our feeble condition, the Spirit kindly increases the illumination by small degrees, as we are able to safely endure it. In comparison to the clear light of truth, we are, as it were, children of a dark cave of ignorance (cf. Plato’s *Republic* 7).

In accordance with the gradual progress of our education, while being brought to perfection in our training for godliness, we were first taught elementary and easier lessons, suited to our intelligence, while the Dispenser of our lots was ever leading us up, by gradually accustoming us, like eyes brought up in the dark, to the great light of truth. For He spares our weakness, and in the depth of the riches of His wisdom, and the inscrutable judgments of His intelligence, used this gentle treatment, fitted for our needs, gradually accustoming us to see first the shadows of objects, and to look at the sun in water, to save us from dashing against the spectacle of pure unadulterated light, and being blinded (*DSS* 14.44,21a).

But note that the

ultimate object of vision is also the medium which enables us to see. So Basil writes: ‘if we are illumined by the divine power, and fix our eyes on the beauty of the image of the invisible God, and through the image are led up to the indescribable beauty of the source [or archetype], it is because we have been inseparably joined to the Spirit of knowledge’ (*DSS* 18.47,29b).¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 34.

The renewal that takes place in the resurrected life is a kind of “transmutation from our earthly and sensuous life to the heavenly conversation which takes place in us through the Spirit” (DSS 19.49,31a). For “there is close relationship with God through the Spirit, for ‘God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father’” (DSS 19.49,31a). The point Basil wishes to make is that conversation with the Spirit “will put you in remembrance, and ‘guide you into all truth’” (DSS 19.49,31b).¹³⁹ The remembrance of the indwelling and perfecting Spirit, the remembrance of a God with a face coming to the world and providing a way, the remembrance of a Father who actively wills the return, as well as the remembrance of humans as *imago Dei* – all these shape the present reality, i.e., develop the reason naturally within each human into an awareness of the presence of persons of God and a habit of constantly conversing with them.¹⁴⁰ It is the remembering and the continual conversation that enables the regenerated soul to be the forming principle of life.

Form is said to be in Matter; Power to be in what is capable of it, Habit to be in him who is affected by it; and so on. Therefore, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit perfects rational beings, completing their excellence, He is analogous to Form. For he, who no longer lives after the flesh, but, being led by the Spirit of God, is called a Son of God, being conformed to the image of the Son of God, is described as spiritual. And as is the power of seeing in the healthy eye, so is the operation of the Spirit in the purified soul (DSS 26.61,38a).

Basil describes a day spent in this kind of conversation with God. Its strength lies

in the purpose of our soul and in deed of virtue reaching every part and moment of our life. ‘Whether you eat,’ it is said, ‘or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.’ As you take your seat at table, pray. As you lift the loaf, offer thanks to the Giver. When you sustain your bodily weakness with wine, remember Him Who supplies you with this gift, to make your heart glad and to

¹³⁹ Basil is drawing from both his philosophical training and his liturgical understanding when he speaks of remembering. Socrates believed one acquired knowledge/moral excellence by remembering, i.e., by the making present of forgotten divine truth. Human thinking and action conform to the good when the truth is grasped from a storehouse within the mind (*Phaedo*). From the beginning, remembering has been an integral element of the covenant relationship with God that so profoundly shaped the life of the historic monotheistic Israelites. First, God initiates; second, humans respond; then follows ongoing living remembrance in which historic events give form to the present and continual thanksgivings shape one’s conversation. Christians carried the theme into new covenant liturgical celebrations of Eucharist. Basil is here describing how critical *anamnesis* is in transforming mundane daily life into personal relationship with the Trinity.

¹⁴⁰ Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal*, 17, describes this conversation as to “kneel before the Father, put my ear against his chest and listen, without interruption, to the heartbeat of God.” Yancey, *Soul Survivor*, 312, explains it in terms of “listening to the voice that says good things about me.”

comfort your infirmity . . . As you put on your tunic, thank the Giver of it. As you wrap your cloak about yourself, feel yet greater love to God, who alike in summer and in winter has given us coverings convenient for us, at once to preserve our life, and to cover what is unseemly. Is the day done? Give thanks to Him Who has given us the sun for our daily work, and has provided for us a fire to light up the night, and to serve the rest of the needs of life. Let night give the other occasions of prayer. When you look up to the heaven and gaze at the beauty of the stars, pray to . . . God the arch-artificer of the universe, Who in wisdom has made them all. When you see all nature sunk in sleep, then again worship Him Who gives us even against our wills release from the continuous strain of toil, and by a short refreshment restores us once again to the vigour of our strength. Let not night herself be all, as it were, the special and peculiar property of sleep. . . . No, let your slumbers be themselves experiences in piety; for it is only natural that our sleeping dreams should be for the most part echoes of the anxieties of the day . . . Thus you will pray without ceasing; if you pray not only in words, but unite yourself to God through all the course of life and so your life is made one ceaseless and uninterrupted prayer (*Prolegomena, Homily 5*, lxix).

Do the conditions of life allow every human to attain to this state? The following text on slavery illustrates Basil's belief in the inherent freedom and equality of all humans as well as his opinion that slavery may be of value to some in developing self-control.

Among men no one is a slave by nature . . . [but at times] any righteous enquirer into the circumstances [of slavery] would declare [it] to be not a sentence of condemnation but a benefit. For it is more profitable that the man who, through lack of intelligence, has no natural principle of rule within himself, should become the chattel of another, to the end that, being guided by the reason of his master, he may be like a chariot with a charioteer, or a boat with a steersman seated at the tiller . . . They who have escaped poverty or war, or do not require the tutelage of others, are free. It follows that even though one man be called master and one servant, nevertheless both in view of our mutual equality of rank and as chattels of our Creator, we are all fellow slaves (*DSS 20.51,32a-b*).

The principle of free and equal agency extends also to women, as Basil demonstrates by making Julitta, a female martyr of Caesarea, the subject of *Homily 5*.

She is described as having said that women no less than men were made after the image of God; that women as well as men were made by their Creator capable of manly virtue; that it took bone as well as flesh to make the woman, and that constancy, fortitude, and endurance are as womanly as they are manly (*Prolegomena, lxix*).

The differences between humans then are like those in any classroom where some students diligently apply themselves to being shaped by their lessons and others waste time. Plotinus has already spoken of the individual choices involved in becoming pure and true to one's essential nature; Basil says "differences of dignities" (*DSS* 16.40,25b) are due to the Spirit's presence in varying degrees, as one has prepared oneself to receive and accept it.

Enabled in Him, we render thanks to our God for the benefits we have received, according to the measure of our purification from evil, as we receive one a larger and another a smaller share of the aid of the Spirit, that we may offer the sacrifice of praise to God (*DSS* 26.63,39b-40a).

For the Holy Spirit is ever present just as art is a potential in the artist but becomes operative only in synergy with the will of the artist. While those with unstable wills are not able to receive the full benefit, in those who are constant the Spirit becomes "like reason in the soul, which is at one time the thought in the heart, and at another speech uttered by the tongue" (*DSS* 26.61,38b). Basil exhorts us "to rule life by the highest standard" in this vivid sailor metaphor.

Hold fast, then, to the rudder of life. Guide your eye . . . Guide ear and tongue . . . Our feelings are waves. Rise above them and you will be a safe steersman of life. Fail to avoid each and all of them skilfully and steadily, and, like some untrimmed boat, with life's dangers all round about you, you will be sunk in the deep sea of sin . . . Men at sea are wont to lift up their eyes to heaven. It is from heaven that they get guidance for their cruise; by day from the sun and by night from the Bear, or from some of the ever-shining stars. By these they reckon their right course. Do keep your eye fixed on heaven, as the Psalmist did who said, "Unto thee lift I up mine eye, O thou that dwellest in the heavens." Keep your eyes on the Sun of righteousness. Directed by the commandments of the Lord, as by some bright constellations, keep your eye ever sleepless . . . Never slumber at the tiller, so long as you live here, amid the unstable circumstances of this world, and you shall receive the help of the Spirit. He shall conduct you every onward. He shall waft you securely by gentle winds of peace, till you come one day safe and sound to yon calm and waveless haven of the will of God (*Prolegomena, Homily 12*,lix).

2.9 Vision of God

Plotinus has commended us to steadfastly gaze at Intellect, the second *hypostasis*, to become authentic human beings. The Cappadocians commonly portray Moses as the ideal example of one who attained to this direct vision of God. Moses, who received a

royal education, who was characterized by humility and an intense love of justice, who spent forty years in contemplation of nature in the wilderness, illustrates that it is possible for a man to be judged worthy to see God “face to face” (*Hex* 1.1,52b). We learn from Basil that God’s instruction “there is a place by me, and stand upon a rock” (cf. Exodus 33.21), means “the place or contemplation in the Spirit” where Moses “was able to see God intelligibly manifested to him” (*DSS* 26.62,39a). In the Holy Spirit “is the special and peculiar place of true worship” where the “sacrifice of praise” is offered, the place where one offers oneself “for the indwelling of God” and becomes “God’s Temple” (*DSS* 26.62,39a). In the Spirit one becomes present to God.

If the Holy Spirit is the place where “the operation of our intelligence” is “carried on in the light,” what do we see in the vision? According to Basil, we first see the Truth or the Son, but because of their inseparable communion the vision cannot but embrace the presence of all three persons.

For it is impossible to behold the Image of the invisible God except by the enlightenment of the Spirit, and impractical for him to fix his gaze on the Image to dis sever the light from the Image, because the cause of vision is of necessity seen at the same time as the visible objects. Thus fitly and consistently do we behold the Brightness of the glory of God by means of the illumination of the Spirit, and by means of the Express Image we are led up to Him of whom He is the Express Image and Seal, graven to the like (*DSS* 26.64,40a-b).

While Plotinus describes the experience as waking up to oneself out of the body and resting in the divine, Basil describes those who have beheld the vision as “absent from the body”; they find their life “is hidden . . . with Christ in God.” They have experienced existentially the position given them at baptism; being “raised together with Him [they] sit together in heavenly places,” sharing in the glory as children and heirs of God (*DSS* 28.69,44b). Basil urges,

Mount in mind with me, and contemplate the condition of the angels; see if any other condition becomes them but one of joy and gladness. It is for that they are counted worthy to stand beside God, and to enjoy the ineffable beauty and glory of our Creator . . . Look to the glory which through patience is laid up for you in heaven . . . Fix your eyes on the heavenly riches, and on the treasure which you have put by for yourself through your good works . . . You shall dance about the throne of God, and be glad with everlasting joy . . . Gather together the joys of the soul. Rise above the sensible perception of present things. Fix your mind on the hope of things eternal. Of these the mere thought suffices to fill the soul with

gladness, and to plant in our hearts the happiness of angels (*Prolegomena, Homily 4, lxii*).

2.10 Effectual Monasticism

According to Gregory Nazianzus, Basil's studies at Athens had convinced him of the value of an ascetic and philosophic life,¹⁴¹ and he spent the year 358 touring Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia, observing various monastic settlements, wondering at their abstinence in eating, their courage in toil, their constancy in nightly prayer, the high and unconquerable spirit that made them despise hunger, thirst, and cold, as if they were unconnected with their bodies, true wayfarers in the world, and already citizens of heaven.¹⁴²

Upon his return to Cappadocia, he founded a monastery near Annesi on the forested banks of the Iris River,¹⁴³ where he lived until his ordination as Bishop of Caesarea in 370 and to which quietude (*hesuchia*) he eagerly returned as often as ecclesiastical life allowed. The Socratic spirit of moderation formed the foundation of the monastery.¹⁴⁴ Much like Plotinus, the governing principles of the life Basil authored expressed the tenet of human being as relational: love for God and neighbour¹⁴⁵ and a commitment to communal life.¹⁴⁶

Basil conceived of the ascetical life as a new life revealed in the Scriptures, founded on faith, requiring the guidance of a director, obliging him who adopted it to a life of retirement, renunciation, purification, and virtue, and affording him in return opportunities for union with God through prayer and love.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴¹ *Basil: Letters*, ed. Schaff and Wace, xvi.

¹⁴² Pierre Pourrat, *Christian Spirituality*, trans. W. H. Mitchell and S. P. Jacques (Westminster: Newman Press, 1953), 87.

¹⁴³ Basil's *Letter XIV*, addressed to Gregory Nazianzus, describes an idyllic island-like retreat situated on the plain of a forested mountain slope. Watered with streams, surrounded on two sides by ravines and on the third by the river with white water and fishes, it is further enhanced by an abundance of bird song, a multitude of flowers, a cool breeze, the fragrance of the land.

¹⁴⁴ *Basil: Letters*, ed. Schaff and Wace, 128b, *Letter 22.2* states: "In all things moderation and respect should be shown to everyone."

¹⁴⁵ Basil, *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*, trans. W. K.L. Clarke (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 288, translating Basil's *Shorter Rules* 163, 469D: "'But the first and great commandment is: Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength; and a second like unto it is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' Then by desiring to become like unto the Lord Who said: 'A new commandment give I unto you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you.'"

¹⁴⁶ Basil's concept of monasticism was a cenobitical society, i.e., based on *koinonia*, reflecting what he believed about the importance of communion for the development of human persons.

¹⁴⁷ Margaret Gertrude Murphy, *St. Basil and Monasticism* (Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1930), 28.

A spiritual director was required as mirror to the monk's person, for "one who lives in isolation will not easily discover his own failings since he has no one to reprove or correct him gently and kindly."¹⁴⁸ Basil is repetitious about the need for the director to exercise restraint in correction: he is to "reject harshness," to exhibit "gentleness by reason of kind encouragement,"¹⁴⁹ acting with "fatherly compassion and skilled words" as he "trains the soul in impassivity."¹⁵⁰ Thus the soul will "be led to practise good . . . so that when reason is added and the power of discrimination . . . habit will make success easy."¹⁵¹ The goal is for the soul to achieve the highest personal relationship, i.e., "a disposition of love towards God the Father . . ."¹⁵²

Although obedience was a requirement, Basil modified existing vows (which called for the renunciation of one's will to a superior), so that submission to the will of God as presented in the precepts of Scripture became primary.¹⁵³ This obligation in no way implied the paralysing of a monk's reason, as it occurred "with the person's own consent and judgement."¹⁵⁴ He was both empowered to object if instructed to a task for which he considered himself unsuited and obliged to reprove the superior if he considered the instruction to violate scripture.¹⁵⁵ Basil's monastic aim was to exemplify philosophy as

a living tradition which includes and . . . perfects the best of pagan thought, especially that of Socrates and Plato . . . It is the spirit of living wisdom which embraces the whole of human life: prayer, manual work, hospitality, care of the sick, of the poor and the dying. It is a life entirely given to God, a life not without risk, a life lived "on the boundaries" of human nature. It includes a vibrant intellectuality, life-long study and a spirit of true inquiry, and it culminates in the divine love of a person, Christ.¹⁵⁶

The tradition modelled a relationship of loving persons resulting in an authentic human life of ecstasy (*kenosis*) on multilevels: towards God, it was a life lived on the edges

¹⁴⁸ Henrietta Leyser, *Hermits and the New Monasticism* (London: Macmillan, 1984), 8.

¹⁴⁹ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 19.

¹⁵⁰ Basil, *Ascetic Works*, trans. Clarke, 176. *Longer Rules* 356C.

¹⁵¹ Basil, *Ascetic Works*, trans. Clarke, 177. *Longer Rules* 356E.

¹⁵² Basil, *Ascetic Works*, trans. Clarke, 292. *Shorter Rules* 172, 473A.

¹⁵³ Basil, *Ascetic Works*, trans. Clarke, 289, quotes *Shorter Rules* 164, 470B: "As regards things which lie within the discretion of the individual and are not the subject of precepts of Scripture . . ."

¹⁵⁴ Basil, *Ascetic Works*, trans. Clarke 177, *Longer Rules* 356E.

¹⁵⁵ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 41-43.

between human and divine nature; towards other humans, it was a life of relating that modelled God's mode of being.

He formulated a rule, which became normative in the east and provided the model for St. Benedict in the west, in which the spirit of the common life, dominated by humility and charity, is the distinctive characteristic.¹⁵⁷ As negative practices, his recommendations include “the suppression of all desires to impress others” and “the withholding of one's judgment in regard to the conduct of others”; positive practices included “lowliness in personal appearance, . . . cheerfulness of manner,” and the “gracious acceptance of the assistance of others.”¹⁵⁸ Yet “the performance of notable actions” is recognized as compatible with humility¹⁵⁹ and, always, interior discipline of the will is preferable to “external mortifications,”¹⁶⁰ which can only serve as a means to that desired end.

Brotherly love is to be the distinguishing mark of the monks' relation to one another, for Basil sees love of neighbour as the existential fulfilment of human nature and misanthropy as due to the forgetting of our common nature.¹⁶¹ His novel work system¹⁶² is designed to further exemplify active charity by meeting the needs of one's neighbour, whether inside or outside of the monastery: as cobbler or educator; in showing hospitality to strangers or caring for travellers, orphans and the sick; in architecture, carpentry, agriculture, tapestry. Work is to be a quiet act of thanksgiving, a prayer of praise from the one whose heart is engaged in the contemplation of a loving, all-giving God.

¹⁵⁶ Gregory Nyssa, *The Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. Kevin Corrigan (Toronto: Peregrina, 1996), 14. Although the quote is directly related to Gregory and Macrina, it can as readily be applied to Basil.

¹⁵⁷ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 11.

¹⁵⁸ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 74-5.

¹⁵⁹ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 77.

¹⁶⁰ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 78.

¹⁶¹ Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 28-29, interpreting *Longer Rules* 3 and 7, goes on to say that the idea probably “owes much to the Stoic principle of *oikeiosis* or natural attractiveness of beings of the same class to each other.” While Basil was undoubtedly familiar with the principle identified, it seems much more likely to me that the shaping force was the deeper perception of the meaning of Trinity as persons and humans as image of the God whose ontological being was *koinonia*.

¹⁶² Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 70. Formerly, as in Pachomius' system, work had been intended as a means of self-support and occupation during time not spent in formal prayers.

For, as previously noted, prayer is what sustains and perfects the life of divine love in the soul; it is what satisfies “the mystical cravings of the human soul”¹⁶³ for communion and union with God.

Prayers . . . rejuvenate and invigorate the soul, which is moved toward God by desire, for beautiful is the prayer that impresses into the mind a clear notion of God. This is properly the ‘inhabitation’ [*enoikeisis*] of God, to have God seated in oneself through memory. Thus we become a temple of God, when earthly cares do not interrupt the continuity of memory, when the mind is not disturbed by unforeseen passions and when, fleeing from all things, the friend of God [*philotheos*] withdraws unto God . . . ¹⁶⁴

Thus Basil’s rule teaches both the vocal prayer of divine psalmody, which allows much opportunity for truth to be gently impressed on the mind, and the mental prayer of contemplation, which purifies the soul of all that hinders recollection of God.¹⁶⁵

2.11 Implications

As it was in Plotinus’ concept of One-Intellect-Soul, the Greek idea of ontological affinity (*syggeneia*, sameness of descent or kindred relationship) between God and humans was absolutely foundational to Basil’s thought. There are several reasons why Basil did not locate this similarity in substance as had previously been done: first, the dichotomy between created substance and unknowable divine substance; second, his conviction that God’s ultimate ontological being is persons in loving communion; third, his belief that humans were created in the image of God as relational beings. Since God’s identity was to be found in going beyond oneself (*ekstasis*), that was the intention for humanity. Yet very quickly a logistical problem develops. Divine person freely wills being or existence, i.e., “divine person precedes substance and causes it to be.”¹⁶⁶ This cannot be the case for humans, who by virtue of their created nature are naturally subject to necessity, i.e., they cannot will themselves into existence as will arises concomitantly with the particularized human composite of body and soul, nor is this existence without the necessity of change. So nature has primacy over person in human being. How then is

¹⁶³ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 93.

¹⁶⁴ Georges Barrios, *The Father Speak* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 49-50, translating Basil’s *Letter 2* which was addressed to Gregory of Nazianzus.

¹⁶⁵ Murphy, *Basil & Monasticism*, 87-92.

¹⁶⁶ Zizioulas, “Teaching on the 2nd Ecumenical Council,” 42.

it possible for human being to image God? By transcending human nature as one participates in ontological divine being; by freely choosing to ground one's personal will in the will of authentic divine persons.

Commonly today, human beings are conceived of as individualized and autonomous entities containing human nature, i.e., "intellectual, psychological and moral qualities centred on the axis of consciousness."¹⁶⁷ Each generally static package develops within itself, in the introverted manner of a container, often relating to itself as object and other (both human and non-human) as possession, to be circumscribed and comprehended in the desperate search for interior happiness. Opposition, division, and fragmentation are commonly the results of this type of thought-structure.¹⁶⁸

Contrast this with Basil's view. The image of God in humans is free will in conjunction with rational thought, what we might call a potential person. The capacity is developed in a progression of ways: first, God invites one to loving relationship; second, one responds to this chosenness by freely engaging in an act of re-creation (baptism), by which a particular human chooses to participate in the community of divine-persons-acting-in-the-created-world; third, by the ongoing remembrance of this choice and the constant relating within the community, one reaches beyond the boundaries of one's own self and becomes a person, i.e., one who freely loves and communes with others. According to Basil, one becomes an existential person, i.e., a particular human who has moved beyond the limitations of identity but still functions within time and space, through a continual process of responding to and conversing with loving divine persons. Informed by the trusting communion of that relationship, one will be gently led to deal with the created other as a mystery to be celebrated with gratitude and discovered through kind friendship. True freedom is a gift to human beings who choose to let go of the deception of egocentrism and the pretence of self-control. They alone are able to return from lostness to be found by the affirming and dynamic embrace of self-giving love; they live in constant anticipation of the conversation of love; they make divine love their life, become transformed by it to reflect the God of whom they are image.

¹⁶⁷ John D. Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity," 406.

¹⁶⁸ Zizioulas, "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity," 425.

From the precepts Basil has established, it is possible to anticipate the affirmations emerging from a human society formed by personhood: hypostatic differentiation rather than individuation; diversity in unity rather than differences in opposition; the other as another self; care of and respect for other species and the world's resources as properly reflective of the unity in which humans recognize themselves as one segment, rather than the distance of domination; knowledge as the identity of love and truth, rather than as a process of gathering and evaluating information; freedom as the ability to choose relationship/communion, rather than as moral decision. Each one of these deserves a separate study. I will here briefly investigate just two implications of the priority of person over substance, as noted by John Zizioulas in his essay "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity."

First, I will demonstrate how creative personal-relational presence permits space to have permeable boundaries. The manufacture of machines, according to Zizioulas, requires the human to turn her/himself "into a thing, an instrument and a means to an end" (411). True creativity involves the opposite process, "the movement from thinghood to personhood" (411); it involves the recognition of things "not according to their own nature, i.e., according to their compelling givenness, but as results of [human] free will" (420). For example, when viewing a work of art or listening to a fine musical selection, it is possible to become aware of a presence – the "substances (cloth, oil, etc.) or qualities (shape, colour, etc.) or sounds become part of a personal presence" (412) – that of the artist who is absent. This demonstrates a paradoxical fact of human personhood, a presence which is realised in and "ultimately revealed as an absence" (412). This same principle is at work in the event that I arrange to meet a friend at a coffee shop, only to be stood up. "The absent person *precisely by not being there* occupies for me the entire space-time context of the café" (413).¹⁶⁹ The "presence-in-absence" of the artist or friend is evidence of a human ontology that breaks through natural boundaries in an ekstatic movement of relating.

Human beings are persons by the very fact that they are not wholly and completely existent for us in their reality [nature], but are characterised by freedom and as a result remain concealed and beyond control in the totality of their [natural bodily] existence. A person whose being we could survey and

¹⁶⁹ Adapting an example used by Sartre.

whose every moment we could anticipate would thereby cease to be a person for us [would become an a-person, just like the chairs in the coffee shop], and where human beings are falsely taken to be existent beings and treated as such, then their personality [i.e., quality of being a person] is treated with contempt.¹⁷⁰

In so far, therefore, as the human person is an entity whose being or particularity is realised by way of a transcendence of its boundaries in an event of communion, its personhood reveals itself as presence. But in so far as the human person is a being whose particularity is established also by its boundaries (a body), personhood realises this presence as absence. Since both of these have their focus on one and the same entity, they represent a paradox, the two components of which must be maintained *simultaneously*, if justice is to be done to the mystery of human personhood (414).

The paradox also points toward a correlation between personal being and uniqueness/unrepeatability in incarnational reality, in that only one particular human being can fulfil his/her role in any given relationship, i.e., in his/her absence another relationship can form, but the specific person is “indispensable and irreplaceable” (410) in any relationship from the moment that it exists. An experience of receiving an expression of sympathy or empathy further corroborates this truth, as do mentoring relationships. But it is pre-eminently verified by intimate love relationships in which bodily boundaries become interwoven in a “dance of reciprocity,”¹⁷¹ e.g., the sexual intercourse of life partners, intentional parents creating a child, a pregnant mother’s surrounding care.

The same paradoxical principle of personal-relational presence in space transforms the time capsule that is history. No event in history produces “irresistible causality” (418) for humans, since humans shape what becomes history in terms of freedom and relationship. But just like the presence-in-absence of art, the future

is subject to the antimony of its negation . . . This antimony is due to creaturehood [i.e., only a being created of matter experiences the passing of time as *pathos*, as leading to breakdown and death] and makes [the hu]man tragically conscious of a

¹⁷⁰ Zizioulas, “Human Capacity and Human Incapacity,” 413, quoting W. Pannenberg, *Basic Questions in Theology*, vol. 3 (1973), 112.

¹⁷¹ Reeve Lindbergh, *Under A Wing* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 86. Reeve’s own son died at the same age as her brother Charles had been at the time of his infamous kidnapping and death, bringing her own experience and her mother’s experience together in one. “I can see the clothing that he left behind for me to find after he was gone, remember how the sight of it flooded me each time with love and pain, bringing his presence and his absence together invincibly, many months after his death, when one tiny white sock, still warm, tumbled out with the rest of the laundry from the drier.”

past which is present only in the form of absence and of a future threatened by nothingness (419).

The threat of death as non-being (422) and the longing for presence gives birth to hope, that is, anticipation of presence without absence, and faith, also known as the confidence that confronts absence as ultimately unacceptable (421-22). Both characteristics are projections of personal love and freedom.

Zizioulas makes several summary statements significant for ontology: first, “personal presence qua presence” seems to come to humans from outside the world (419), as the intersection of time and timelessness, space and spacelessness; second, personhood prefers to create its presence as absence rather than be contained, comprehended, described and manipulated through the circumscribability and individualization which are inherent in all creaturehood (420).

How does all this play out in Basil’s anthropology? The mystery of human being becomes clear in *theosis* or restoration of communion with the persons of God. The Incarnation is the pivotal event in fulfilling human destiny as image of God, since it is here where the division between uncreated divine nature and created human nature becomes merely a difference, thus allowing true communion among divine and human persons. It is in the hypostatic union¹⁷² that human nature “recovers its *ekstatic* movement towards God” (435). Relation (*schesis*) becomes “constitutive of a particular being,” the catholic human being Jesus Christ, and thus every human “‘in Christ’ becomes a true person *not through another* ‘*schesis*’ but only in and through the one filial relationship which constituted Christ’s being” (436). As Basil says, human being is “re-created,” constituted by the unity of free divine persons; in Christ, every human acquires particularity, *hypostasis*, personhood, ultimate ontological being (437).

Christological mystery further establishes that Christ is both one, in his own *hypostasis*, and many, by virtue of the fact that the one became the constitutive element of many *hypostases*. The Son was present at ‘the beginning’ of creation; is present at all our existential beginnings, wherever and whenever time and eternity intersect for us; will

¹⁷² Classical title for belief in two natures, divine and human, existing without compromise of either in the one person of Jesus Christ, i.e., “it is his person that makes divine and human natures to be that particular being called [Jesus] Christ.” Zizioulas, “Human Capacity And Human Incapacity,” 436.

be present at our eschatological beginnings. He is the beginning, the way, the companion traveller, and the goal/vision.

In Christ, love and communion become the attribute that typifies not only interpersonal relationships but also all cosmic relations, as the all-embracing divine is embodied in particular ecstatic human persons who together reach out to the rest of creation. Ecclesiastical communion becomes paramount as it shapes patterns for all of the rest of life, patterns of *anamnesis* or the continual remembering of who we are in Christ,¹⁷³ and of *anaphora* or the referring of created nature back to its Creator in “many small returns”¹⁷⁴ of gratitude and trust.

Every time a human being becomes aware of the cosmic significance of the eucharist, each time a pure being receives a humble sensation with gratitude – whether he eats a fruit or inhales the fragrance of the earth – a sort of joy of eternity reverberates in the marrow of things.¹⁷⁵

2.12 Conclusion

Basil’s anthropology is immensely complex and inter-relational. It is, in fact, an anthropology of being in communion. The ontological essence of expressed particularity in the divine or the human is an *ekstatic* relationship, i.e., it involves the transcending of the boundaries of self-identity to become a *hypostasis* or person. For Basil, authentic human being is an *ekstatic* way of living “on the boundaries” of human nature that properly reflects the divine mode of being, which is capable of uniting and penetrating the boundaries of all beings. Training for virtue or excellence or divine life requires, first, the developing of the habit of remembering who God is and who we are and, second, allowing love and faith to shape us in an ongoing conversation. The soul regenerated by the Holy Spirit acts as the forming principle of life. Faith, then, is the ongoing remembrance that one’s inner self is rooted in and permeated by divine wisdom. Love is the constant relating to the other, both divine and human.

¹⁷³ Joseph Mercola, “Visual Evidence of the Power of Prayer: Gratitude and Appreciation,” May 2002, <<http://www.mercola.com/2002/may/8/prayer.html>> (29 March 2003). The article outlines the work of Dr. Masary Emoto, who discovered that water’s inner crystalline molecular structure transforms in accord with various factors of vibration and consciousness. Much experimentation demonstrated that water formed beautiful snowflake patterns in response to classical music and thoughts of love and gratitude, while heavy metal music and thoughts of hate and discord resulted in “distorted, formless, smudged images.”

¹⁷⁴ Nouwen, *Return of the Prodigal*, 117.

¹⁷⁵ Olivier Clement, “*L’homme dans le monde*,” *Verbum Caro*, vol. 12:45 (1958), 11-12.

Basil began the project of describing how divine and human persons relate. Yet missing from his unfinished *Hexaemeron* is the creation of the human, a task that Gregory of Nyssa will complete. And although Basil has given an excellent account of self-knowledge and self-discipline, Gregory will further develop what was involved in the fall and what is necessary for a human engaged in the ultimate vocation – the ascent of virtue.

CHAPTER THREE: GREGORY OF NYSSA c. 331 – 395.

3.1 An Existential Being

Gregory, the third son born to St. Basil the Elder and St. Emmelia of Cappadocia, was probably educated at home due to a weak physical constitution. Yet there is no doubt that he had extensive knowledge of classical texts, as evidenced in an abundance of extant works, and he initially pursued a career as a rhetorician. Details of his life during this time are argued inconclusively, with some texts suggesting that he married Theosebia, the sister of Gregory Nazianzus.¹⁷⁶ Others say that he may have been persuaded to spend some years at Pontus, joining his brother Basil in a monastic way of life, studying sacred texts along with early Christian writings, Origen in particular,¹⁷⁷ and gaining a keen appreciation of the natural beauty around him.¹⁷⁸ It is verifiable that Basil summoned him to the position of coadjutor at Caesarea, then to the bishopric at Nyssa in 372. It was an obscure posting, but Basil defended his choice by saying that “he did not desire his brother to receive distinction from the name of his See, but rather to confer distinction upon it.”¹⁷⁹ The first six years of this appointment were a series of misadventures, demonstrating how he struggled to live out his convictions with regard to his theory of personhood, but eventually Gregory became firmly established at Nyssa.

¹⁷⁶ Jean Danielou & Herbert Musurillo, *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961), 3. Gregory Nyssa, *The Lord's Prayer; The Beatitudes*, trans. Hilda C. Graef, vol. 18 of *Ancient Christian Writers* (Maryland: Newman Press, 1954), 3-4.

¹⁷⁷ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 29, 7, 37-8, 324. It seems evident that the pre-eminent third-century scholar Origen of Alexandria had an influence on the work of the Cappadocians, notably because they all sought a complementarity between Greek culture and the Christian tradition, but also because the Cappadocians were serious scholars who thoughtfully investigated the work of brilliant forerunners and Origen was the benchmark. One finds many similar themes in their work, e.g., the role of angels, allegorical interpretation of scripture, *apokatastasis*. Close scrutiny will reveal that they do not follow him blindly but make modifications to his theories based on their own convictions, e.g., the Cappadocians abandon Origen's idea of pre-existent souls.

¹⁷⁸ *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, Etc.*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 4.

¹⁷⁹ *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises*, ed. Schaff and Wace, 5.

Upon the death of his older brother in 379, the cloak of defender of the Nicene faith passed to Gregory and he took on an increasingly prominent role in this capacity, developing a profound philosophical system of thought. One of the hundred and fifty bishops who attended the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381, he presented the inaugural address and part of a greater treatise written to defend Basil's positions on Trinity and Incarnation, in addition to several other official presentations, including an address at the installation of Gregory Nazianzen as Metropolitan at Constantinople. He remained an eminent authority in the eastern church, highly regarded by the imperial court. Of his later years little is known, however, his great contributions were recognized at the Ecumenical Council of 787 with the bestowing of the title 'Father of Fathers.'

Gregory of Nyssa is renowned as "one of the great mystic theologians of antiquity,"¹⁸⁰ possibly even as "the founder of mystical theology in the Church."¹⁸¹ His major works which will place his anthropology in context are *De hominis opificio* and *De vita Mosis*. Gregory provides a broad exegesis of the intrinsic nature of human being, introduces a theory of life after death, and develops a comprehensive allegory for the ascent of virtue.

3.2 On the Making of Human Being

Gregory wrote the philosophical treatise *De hominis opificio* to complete Basil's unfinished *Hexaemeron*, which ended without having explored the creation of the human and thus lacks important information for determining true human vocation. This treatise answers the questions: What is the position of "that great and precious thing, man?"¹⁸² For what purpose did God create human being? What is the intended end? Gregory will establish that humans were created as dialogic beings, sharing conversation and communion with God and other created beings.

After completing the rest of creation, says Gregory, God assigned to the human

¹⁸⁰ Gregory Nyssa, *Lord's Prayer*, trans. Graef, 16.

¹⁸¹ *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), back cover, citing Jean Danielou.

¹⁸² *Gregory Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises*, ed. Schaff and Wace, *De Hominis opificio* 2.1, 390a. All parenthetical references in section 3.2 refer to this text.

the enjoyment of the things which were there; and for this reason He gives him as foundations the instincts of a two-fold organization, blending the divine with the earthy, that by means of both he may be naturally and properly disposed to each enjoyment, enjoying God by means of his more divine nature, and the good things of earth by the sense that is akin to them (2.2,390a-b).

Indeed, God's whole purpose in all of creation was to prepare "a royal lodging" for this "ruler" and "king," so that by the enjoyment of this "royal treasure-house," the human being "might have knowledge of the Giver, and by the beauty and majesty of the things he saw might trace out that power of the Maker which is beyond speech and language" (2.1,390a). As in Basil, 'knowing' presupposes an intimate relationship of like beings, emphasized in the above texts by an enjoyment that is both aesthetic and sensual, that goes beyond words.

God, holding counsel in a dialogic process to determine "to what archetype it is fitting that it should bear a likeness," gave to the human being prior to "his genesis" the rank of "image" of the divine beauty (3.1,390b). From its inception, human constitution was of an exalted character as "a formation fit for the exercise of royalty," having within itself "superior advantages of soul . . . in that it owns no lord, and is self-governed, swayed autocratically by its own will" (4.1,390b–391a). "Created to be royal from the first," it was

made as it were a living image, partaking with the archetype both in rank and in name . . . clothed in virtue, which is in truth the most royal of all raiment, and in place of the sceptre, leaning on the bliss of immortality, and instead of the royal diadem, decked with the crown of righteousness; so that it is shown to be perfectly like to the beauty of its archetype in all that belongs to the dignity of royalty (4.1,391a).

Gregory, who is well known for his various and vivid metaphors,¹⁸³ describes the creation of human being as God painting a self-portrait to express "His own beauty, by the addition of virtues, as it were with colours . . . [being concerned] that the beauty of the original may be accurately transferred to the likeness" (5.1,391a). "Purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, alienation from all evil: . . . with such hues as these did the

¹⁸³ Gregory Nyssa, *Lord's Prayer*, trans. Graef, 8. Graef says Gregory often "takes flight into the realm of Divine Beauty," leaving altogether "the firm ground of the literal sense," but "happily these flights of allegory are not too frequent" in the two works under her study. This seems to me to indicate her own prosaic preferences rather than any deficiency in Gregory.

Maker of His own image mark our nature” (5.1,391b). Other points of divine beauty are also “perfectly preserved” in the image. “Word and understanding” in human nature are “an imitation of the very Mind and Word. Again, God is love,” so this is

to be our feature too; . . . thus, if this be absent, the whole stamp of the likeness is transformed. [And yet again,] the Deity beholds and hears all things, and searches all things out: you too have the power of apprehension of things by means of sight and hearing, and the understanding that inquires into things and searches them out (5.2,391b).

Furthermore, since divine being is “simple and uniform” (20.3,410a), humans also apprehend by means of “one faculty, the implanted mind itself, which passes through each of the organs of sense and grasps the things beyond” (6.1,391b). The senses “are stamped on human nature . . . to be significant characters, with reference to their models” in the divine (6.2,392a). So as imitation of the archetype, all human being has the following characteristics: it functions with just one mind; it is to be characterized by loving dialogic process with ‘the other’; it seeks to know all things by means of the senses such as seeing and hearing which somehow model God’s way of knowing.

Even “the very form of the body . . . [shows it] to be such as to be adapted for royalty” (4.1,391a). An upright posture is significant but in particular the hands are noted to be “a special property of the rational nature” – to enable the human being to “speak by writing” (8.2,393a), but that is the secondary purpose. Even more important is the need to free the mouth from gathering food for the primary purpose of conversing, a necessity for dialogic beings. “The Creator . . . thus devised by their means a special advantage for reason” (8.8,395a), “and hence is produced the service of the hands, so varied and multiform, and answering to every thought” (30.9,423b).

As Plotinus and Basil, Gregory subscribed to the Aristotelian model of “power of life and soul” (8.4,393b), allowing for a tripartite soul: vegetative, to provide growth and nourishment, which correlates to the heart and a corporeal disposition; sensory, to manage the activity of sense and perception, which relates to the soul and the natural disposition of neutrality with regard to vice and virtue; and rational, to provide intelligence and order to the whole, which relates to the mind and spiritual being. As a “rational animal” (8.5,394a) human being is “perfect bodily life” (8.4,393b). That creation has reached culmination is evidenced by human capacity for mind to operate

through the senses. Gregory emphasizes that the blending of these three forms of soul in human being results in a “commixture” that cannot be separated in experience (8.5,394a).

In consideration of the Platonic image of God as divine craftsman, Gregory asks, “What method is there for the production of matter from the immaterial” (23.3,413b)? The answer supplied is that divine will is a “sufficient cause to the things that are, for their coming into existence out of nothing” (23.5,414a). Actually, the specific attributes of matter are all intelligible categories. God’s “intellectual nature” gave “being to the intellectual potentialities, and the mutual concurrence of these” brought “to its genesis the material nature” of bodily existence (24.2,414b).

“Intelligible and incorporeal” mind, “*imparted*” as “the proper adornment of His own nature” (9.1,395a), requires a bodily form to make “known its hidden thoughts.” In a dialogic analogy that suggests a Platonic stance of dualism,¹⁸⁴ Gregory says mind relates to body as a concert master, as “some skilled musician . . . deprived of his own voice” yet wishing to “make melody with voices of others” (9.2,395a) to produce speech, “the music of reason” (10.1,395b). Mind plays over the whole instrument of the body, “touching each of the parts in a mode corresponding to its intellectual activities.” A further metaphor of conjunction eliminates the dualism of the previous correspondence. Mind, says Gregory, is like a city with “different entrances” (10.4,396a). It “distributes itself into faculties of sensation” (11.1,396b), acting as an inner fortress of storehouses, sorting and organizing the knowledge entering by means of the senses (10.3,395b). It is “equally in contact with each of the parts according to a kind of combination which is indescribable” (12.6,398a), present in yet not identical with any of them, for it provides intelligibility to the differences (11.1,396b). Gregory recaps in summary: “mind is not restricted to any part of the body, but is equally in touch with the whole, producing its motion according to the nature of the part which is under its influence” (14.1,402b). Yet mind remains “inoperative and ineffective upon those which are unable to admit the movement of its art” (12.8,398b).

¹⁸⁴ Plato, *The Republic and Other Works*, trans. B. Jowett (New York: Doubleday, 1989), 517. In *Phaedo*, Socrates describes soul using body as “an instrument of perception” and how souls are “simply fastened and glued to their bodies: the soul is only able to view existence through the bars of a prison.” In this view, soul remains separable, rather than essentially integrated, a higher power using a lower as a means to an end.

The “more refined” doctrine of mind set out in the following quote argues that mind participates in its archetype as a “mirror” of intelligible being. Note that, in an orderly human nature, sensible matter is fully able to participate in intelligibility and act as a “mirror of the mirror” as long as it remains a self-reflective participant in the conversation. However, as in Plotinus, it can also draw mind into chaos, in which case Gregory says the living creature is not reflecting the face of goodness but denying its own good nature by holding the mirror behind its back.

For since the most beautiful and supreme good of all is the Divinity Itself, to which incline all things that have a tendency towards what is beautiful and good, we therefore say that the mind, as being in the image of the most beautiful, itself also remains in beauty and goodness as long as it partakes as far as is possible in its likeness to the archetype; but if it were at all to depart from this it is deprived of that beauty in which it was. And as we said that the mind was adorned by the likeness of the archetypal beauty, being formed as though it were a mirror to receive the figure of that which it expresses, we consider that the nature which is governed by it is attached to the mind in the same relation, and that it too is adorned by the beauty that the mind gives, being, so to say, a mirror of the mirror; and that by it is swayed and sustained the material element of that existence in which the nature is contemplated. Thus so long as one keeps in touch with the other, the communication of the true beauty extends proportionally through the whole series, beautifying by the superior nature that which comes next to it; but when there is any interruption of this beneficent connection, or when, on the contrary, the superior comes to follow the inferior, then is displayed the misshapen character of matter, when it is isolated from nature (for in itself matter is a thing without form or structure), and by its shapelessness is also destroyed that beauty of nature with which it is adorned through the mind; and so the transmission of the ugliness of matter reaches through the nature to the mind itself, so that the image of God is no longer seen in the figure expressed by that which was moulded according to it, for the mind, setting the idea of good like a mirror behind the back, turns off the incident rays of the effulgence of the good, and it receives into itself the impress of the shapelessness of matter (12.9-10,398b-399a).

Evil thus begins in the human mind with the withdrawal from participation as “image of the beautiful and the good,” and results in the fragmentation of compound human nature and the loss of its status as “image of the image” (12.11,399a). As long as “in the compound nature of man the mind is governed by God” and governs the “material life,” the human being “remains in its natural state . . . [of] sound health”; anything other

than this is alienation and perversion and unnatural powerlessness for “the living creature” (12.13-14,399b & 13.2,400a).

The life of bodies is “material and subject to flux, always advancing by way of motion” (13.1,399b, cf. Heracleitus fragment 49a), subject to impulses of passion, i.e., with a tendency to be controlled by pain or pleasure (14.1,403a). The “vital faculty” that provides stability and renewal in the midst of the change is the previously mentioned blended soul, acting not as a “conglomeration” but as building from a foundation (14.2,403a), so that the higher faculty rules the whole in its advance toward the prototype, drawing the lower forms into itself.

The true and perfect soul is naturally one, the intellectual and immaterial, which mingles with our material nature by the agency of the senses; but all that is of material nature, being subject to mutation and alteration, will, if it should partake of the animating power, move by way of growth; if, on the contrary, it should fall away from the vital energy, it will reduce its motion to destruction. Thus, neither is there perception without material substance, nor does the act of perception take place without the intellectual faculty (14.2-3,403a).

Even as “mind is not confined to any one part of us, but is equally in all and through all” (15.3,403b), the conjoining with body, while completely real and lasting, remains in the realm of mystery.

The union of the mental with the bodily presents a connection unspeakable and inconceivable, – not being within it (for the incorporeal is not enclosed in a body), nor yet surrounding it without (for that which is incorporeal does not include anything), but the mind approaching our nature in some inexplicable and incomprehensible way, and coming into contact with it, is to be regarded as both in it and around it, neither implanted in it nor enfolded with it, except so far as this, that while the nature prospers according to its own order, the mind is also operative (15.3,404a).

The original creation was of “our whole nature extending from the first to the last,” as “one image of Him Who is” (16.18,406), an “image of the nature of the Creator” (16.2,404b), with one intellect whose essence is relationship. For Gregory, gender divisions remain firmly outside of the image or mind; since such a distinction is alien to

the prototype,¹⁸⁵ it does not exist in either paradisaal or eschatological humanity, a theme I will develop more fully later in the chapter. There existed in “God’s foreknowledge” (29.1,420b), a “fulness of nature” (22.4,411b) or a “universal humanity” pre-existent before the appearance of the particular man scripture calls Adam (29.1,420b & 22.3,411b).

However, individual packages of human nature, i.e., a particular unit of body and soul, have a simultaneous beginning. The whole “form of the future man” is already present “potentially” and in concealment in the womb (29.4,421a). Gregory likens it to the form of the potential plant present in the seed, possessing all the “potentiality of its nature,” which unfolds

by a natural sequence as it proceeds to its perfect state, not employing anything external to itself as a stepping-stone to perfection, but itself advancing its own self in due course to the perfect state (29.3,421a).

Note the huge emphasis on the self-determination of human being apparent in that statement. In reference to such statements, Hilda Graef says that there is, in Gregory, “no mention of grace. . . . This is, indeed a defect of almost all Greek theology. But in reading these Fathers we have always to remember that neither Augustine nor Pelagius had argued this subject when they wrote. . . .”¹⁸⁶ Her point of view reflects a bias toward an Augustinian theology, which also prevents her from identifying the incredible gift of grace inherent in, constitutive of, and essential to the whole of Gregory’s image philosophy. Werner Jaeger takes a more scholarly approach in his study of Gregory’s treatise *De Instituto Christiano*:

[Gregory] is tireless in pointing out biblical passages in which the need for incessant human effort is emphasized, and he postulates a strict reciprocity between the effect of grace and human works, so that the gift of grace can, so to speak, be measured by the increased efforts of him who receives it . . . Gregory’s treatise may be characterized as the work in which the theology of the Eastern

¹⁸⁵ For Gregory, the terms mother and father are interchangeable as applied to God. *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Commentary on the Song of Songs*, trans. Casimir McCambley (Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1987), 145, translates J.213 as: “No one can adequately grasp the terms pertaining to God. For example, ‘mother’ is mentioned (in the Song) in place of ‘father.’ Both terms mean the same, because there is neither male nor female in God . . .” Again in J.183,131: “The ‘chamber’ is indeed the heart which becomes an acceptable dwelling of God when it returns to that state which it had in the beginning made ‘by her who conceived me.’ We would be correct by understanding ‘mother’ as the first cause of our being.” Cf. Paul (Galatians 3:28), who says there is neither male nor female in Christ Jesus.

¹⁸⁶ Gregory Nyssa, *Lord’s Prayer*, trans. Graef, 19.

Church reached the culminating point of its tendency to bring the two basic elements of the Christian religion, divine grace and human effort, into perfect balance . . . Obviously it would be unhistorical to approach this philosophical effort from the point of view of the Augustinian doctrine of grace . . . [Even to classify it as Semipelagianism] would be anachronistic . . .¹⁸⁷

In Gregory's philosophy, from the moment of conception, the power of soul resides in the potential human being, "preparing for itself its proper dwelling place" (29.7,421b), "transforming it" through a "necessary sequence of events" as "it advances concurrently with the bodily growth" (29.4,421a-b), its "energies" growing along with the development of the compound "subject" (29.6,421b). Commenting on Moses' exhortation, "Take heed to thyself" (Deuteronomy 4.23, cf. Basil, Plotinus, Socratic wisdom and the oracle at Delphi), Gregory plainly assumes the self-intuition of soul as a backdrop for life and finds it

superfluous to declare at length what is to be found in ourselves, as though we were expounding some wonder that lay beyond our boundaries: – who that looks on himself needs words to teach him his own nature? (29.10,422a).

Plant imagery provides other analogies pertinent to human life, which yet again emphasize the self-possession necessary for growth to maturity. The soul can be described as a head of grain, in which "the proper nourishment passes spontaneously, without trouble, from the common source to the individuality of each of the seeds" (27.7,419a). The body is compared to a garden containing "countless varieties" of plants, different in "figure, quality, and individuality in great variety of detail"; each nourished in its own spot by a common source of moisture and changing the nourishment into "different qualities" such as color, scent, sweetness, etc. But just as plants cannot exist in isolation, neither can bodies; they must be planted in the "animated soil of our being by Nature, or rather by Nature's Lord (30.27,426a).

We plant in the ground the kernels of fruits, and portions torn from roots, not deprived by death of the vital power which naturally resides in them, but preserving in themselves, hidden indeed, yet surely living, the property of their prototype; the earth that surrounds them does not implant such a power from without, infusing it . . . but it makes that manifest which resides in them, nourishing it by its own moisture, perfecting the plant into root, and bark, and

¹⁸⁷ Werner Jaeger, *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius* (Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1965), 87 - 89.

pith, and shoots of branches, which could not happen were not a natural power implanted with it . . . (29.11,422a).

Gregory's purpose in using all these plant analogies is to demonstrate eternal realities from what appears completely obvious in nature.

Our purpose was to show that the seminal cause of our constitution is neither a soul without a body, nor a body without soul, but that, from animated and living bodies, it is generated at the first as a living and animate being, and that our humanity takes it and cherishes it like a nursling with the resources she herself possesses, and it thus grows . . . for it at once displays . . . the power of soul that is interwoven in it, appearing at first somewhat obscurely, but afterwards increasing in radiance concurrently with the perfecting of the work (30.29,426b).

While bodily being consists of "flux and change" and continual alteration, the other "constituent" part of human being remains "stationary," as Gregory illustrates by way of another metaphor.

The body is on the one hand altered by way of growth and diminution, changing, like garments, the vesture of its successive statures, while the form on the other hand, remains in itself unaltered through every change, not varying from the marks once imposed upon it by nature, but appearing with its own tokens of identity in all the changes which the body undergoes (27.3,418a-b).

The one exception to the steadfast stability of soul is "the deformity of sickness [which] takes possession of the form like some strange mask," deforming the mind's "own marks of identity" (27.4,418b). The argument is for an integral unity of mind and body so thorough and indissoluble that everything that happens to the body affects the mind; thus severe bodily illness may even cause intrinsic personality traits to become hidden (15.3,404a & 27.4,418b).

In the end, Gregory, like Plotinus and Basil, finds the image of the sculptor to be the best analogy for the way soul functions in body, first "chipping away the superfluous parts," then advancing to an outline of what he has in mind, bringing it "more nearly to the semblance of the object he has in view; lastly, producing in the material the perfect and finished figure" (30.30,426b).

If one supposes the like in the case of the soul he is not far from probability; for we say that Nature, the all-contriving, takes from its kindred matter the part that comes from the man, and moulds her statue within herself. . . . The form of the soul is expressed in the substratum, incompletely in that which is still incomplete,

perfect in that which is perfect; indeed it would have been perfect from the beginning had our nature not been maimed by evil. Thus . . . the Divine image does not at once shine forth at our formation, but brings man to perfection by a certain method and sequence, through those attributes of the soul which are material and belong rather to the animal creation (30.30,426b).

Let us, with Gregory, step back once more to the garden of original creation and see how he develops the theme of the fall beyond Basil's brief statement of manipulation. "Every" tree in paradise, including the tree of life named Wisdom ("the Lord," cf. Proverbs 3.18), was meant to nourish by bestowing "every form of good [that] is in harmony with itself" (19.5,409b). The forbidden tree of knowledge had "a certain mixed disposition," not "absolutely evil (because it is decked with good), nor as a thing purely good (because evil is latent in it)" (20.3,410a). Since "man would not have been deceived by manifest evil" (20.4,410b), the serpent took advantage of evil's appearing to be "some phantom of the good" (20.2,410a) and enticed with "poisons that are prepared with honey" (20.4,410b).

Evil is many-coloured and fairly adorned, being esteemed to be one thing and revealed by experience as another, the knowledge of which (that is, its reception by experience) is the beginning and antecedent of death and destruction (20.3,410a-b).

Knowledge and experience (*pathos*) are thus mixed and partial blessings in that they can be used for good or for evil (reminding one of the dangers awaiting descended souls in Plotinus). They are set in opposition to the wholeness of wisdom and immutability (*apatheia*), which constitute changeless and harmonious good.

As we have already seen, Gregory takes a fair bit of liberty with the creation text in scripture (Gen. 1:27-28) and places gender division outside of the original creation, as an event that occurred after the fall.

It was not when He made that which was in His own image that He bestowed on man the power of increasing and multiplying; but when He divided it by sexual distinctions, then He said, 'Increase and multiply, and replenish the earth.' For this belongs not to the Divine, but to the irrational element, as the history indicates when it narrates that these words were first spoken by God in the case of the irrational creatures; since we may be sure that, if He had bestowed on man, before imprinting on our nature the distinction of male and female, the power for increase conveyed by this utterance, we should not have needed this form of generation by which the brutes are generated (12.4,412a).

In contrast to singularity of original human nature, fallen human nature is a blend of “the Divine, the rational and intelligent element which does not admit the distinction of male and female,” with “the irrational, our bodily form and structure divided into male and female” as God’s “provision for reproduction . . . on account of [human] inclination to material things” (16.9,405a & 17.5,407b). For Gregory, all the passions issue from the initial degeneration into distinction by gender (18.1,407a), for with “the animal mode of generation” came also brutish instincts for “self-preservation,” e.g., anger, fear, greediness, pleasure (18.2,408a). To the divine image in human being was added a “constitutional liability to passion” (18.1,407b). Having become “heavy” with “the weight of the irrational nature,” the tendency is “for the ruling element of our soul . . . to be dragged downward.” The resulting “misery that encompasses us often causes the Divine gift to be forgotten, and spreads the passions of the flesh, like some ugly mask, over the beauty of the image” (18.6,408b).

How will the resultant “heavy and corporeal existence” (22.2,411b) be returned again to its authentic state of personhood? By laying claim to the commissioning of human being as image of divine person, by continually remembering our intended purpose of communion with divine persons, by participating in the principle of excellence hidden within us as we freely choose to rule over the irrational. True freedom, Gregory says, is the ability to participate in the virtue of divine being.

God is in His own nature all that which our mind can conceive of good; – rather, transcending all good that we can conceive or comprehend. He creates man for no other reason than that He is good; and being such, and having this as His reason for entering upon the creation of our nature, He would not exhibit the power of His goodness in an imperfect form, giving our nature some one of the things at His disposal, and grudging it a share in another; but the perfect form of goodness is here to be seen by His both bringing man into being from nothing, and fully supplying him with all good gifts . . . for if the Deity is the fulness of good, and this is His image, then the image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good. Thus there is in us the principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom, and every higher thing that we conceive; but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from necessity, and not in bondage to any natural power, but have decision in our own power as we please; for virtue is a voluntary thing, subject to no dominion; that which is the result of compulsion and force cannot be virtue (16.10-11,405b).

The principal difference between divine and human nature, as Gregory sees it, is in the fact that the uncreated prototype is immutable in goodness, i.e., characterized by *apatheia*, while human nature is always subject to the necessity of change; since “that which came into being by creation had the beginning of its existence from change” (16.14,406a). However, since the divine mind, the “principle of all excellence, all virtue and wisdom,” was placed within the human (16.11,405b), giving the soul the capacity to participate in ontology, wherever soul freely exercises “natural management” of the change and chooses the relationship (30.9,423b), it becomes an orderly advancement into the likeness of divine persons who freely choose the good. The image becomes sharper and reflects the prototype more clearly, like a camera lens coming into focus.

The action of the soul on the body is like the indelible impression a seal makes in hot wax (cf. Aristotle *De an*). “Those things which have received from the seal the impression of its stamp do not fail to be recognized by the soul.” The resurrection of the body is thus not beyond probability, says Gregory, for although “the dissolution of the body into its component parts does take place” (26.2,417b), the soul never abandons that to which it has been conjoined, rather it “attracts again to itself that which is its own and properly belongs to it” (27.2,418a).

For as the soul is disposed to cling to and long for the body that has been wedded to it, there also attaches to it in secret a certain close relationship and power of recognition, in virtue of their commixture, as though some marks had been imprinted by nature, by the aid of which the community remains unconfused . . . (27.2,418a).

In another picture, Gregory describes the process as like the scattering of drops of mercury slowly “poured out” on a “dusty slope,” which easily flow back together and join into one (27.6,418).

So, whenever “the full complement of human nature has reached the limit of the pre-determined measure” (22.6,412a), the “limit of time” will be removed and all will be transformed

at once to incorruptibility, so that the weight of the flesh is no longer heavy, nor does its burden hold them down to earth, but they rise aloft through the air – for, ‘we shall be caught up,’ he tells us, ‘in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord’ (22.6,412b).

Not only is the resurrection highly likely, Gregory also holds a well-founded hope for “another kingdom, of a description that belongs to unspeakable mysteries” (21.4,411a), when creation will return to source. The idea of *apokatastasis* originates with the concept of limitations for evil, for “wickedness is not so strong as to prevail over the power of good” (21.1,410b).

It is impossible that that which is always mutable and variable should be more firm and more abiding than that which always remains the same and is firmly fixed in goodness: . . . it is absolutely certain that the Divine counsel possesses immutability, while the changeableness of our nature does not remain settled even in evil (21.1,410b).

Remember that human nature is by nature flux and motion, moving either upward toward the good or descending into the abyss of the, apparently, bounded void. The limitations of evil, acting in accordance with the flux of matter, allow Gregory to speculate about the return of all to source.

Now that which is always in motion, if its progress be to good, will never cease moving onwards to what lies before it, by reason of the infinity of the course to be traversed: – for it will not find any limit of its object such that when it has apprehended it, it will at last cease its motion: but if its bias be in the opposite direction, when it has finished the course of wickedness and reached the extreme limit of evil, then that which is ever moving, finding no halting point for its impulse natural to itself, when it has run through the lengths that can be run in wickedness, of necessity turns its motion toward good: for as evil does not extend to infinity, but is comprehended by necessary limits, it would appear that good once more follows in succession upon the limit of evil; and thus . . . the ever-moving character of our nature comes to run its course at the last once more towards good, being taught the lesson of prudence by the memory of its former misfortunes, to the end that it may never again be in like case (21.2,410b-411a).

It is inevitable then that eventually evil will expire, that good will prevail, that all will attain paradise along with the tree of life, the grace of the image, and the dignity of rule (21.4,411a).

3.3 The Ascent of Virtue

Earlier I introduced Gregory’s conviction that, since the principle of excellence is implanted in humanity, whenever the soul freely chooses relationship with divinity the change inherent in human being becomes an orderly advance into the divine likeness. Gregory’s philosophical treatise entitled *De vita Mosis* uses the biblical record of the life

of Moses as an allegory to develop the theme and argue that, for dialogic, self-ruling, created human being, “the virtuous life is a perpetual progress (*epektasis*) based on the infinite goodness of God.”¹⁸⁸ In fact, “perfection is progress itself: the perfect man is the one who continually makes progress”¹⁸⁹ in goodness (1.10,31).

Communion with God is a constant ascent ‘from glory to glory.’ Each step of this ascent includes the joy of further expectation, the knowledge that He always remains greater than anything we can know of Him, and also that He gives Himself to man without setting any limits, because of His own inexhaustibility. Thus, in meeting God, there is never frustration, or satiety, but only the discovery of true Love (xiii – xiv, cf. 2 Cor 3.18 & *On Perfection*).

Having established the basis for progress from the Apostle Paul who “never ceased straining toward those things that are still to come” (1.5,30, cf. Phil 3.13), and having clarified that this life of virtuous choice is available equally to male and female (1.12,32), Gregory develops the thesis in three stages: vision of God in the light, hearing God in the cloud, touching God in thick darkness.¹⁹⁰

3.3.1 The Light: Natural Reason

Moses’ birth serves as a metaphor of naturally rational human nature, which is in a state of “constantly experiencing change, . . . in a sense always coming to birth.” But since this is a birth that “occurs by choice,”

we are in some manner our own parents, giving birth to ourselves by our own free choice in accordance with whatever we wish to be, whether male or female, moulding ourselves to the teaching of virtue or vice. We can most certainly enter upon a better birth into the realm of light . . . (2.3-4,55-56).

It is the “rational faculties” (*logismoi* or “the innermost thoughts” of implanted mind, according to *De vita Moses* 183 n. 281) that become the “parents of virtue,” with free will serving both as the midwife and as the one who nourishes the new birth (2.4-5,56). Gregory also points out the importance of living in community, in a familial setting “among those of like disposition and mind,” to assist “the will of guiding reason” (*nous* or mind) to properly shepherd “all the movements” of soul (2.18,59).

¹⁸⁸ *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*, trans. Malherbe & Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), xvi. Parenthetical references in section 3.3 refer to pages in this text. References to other classical Greek works by Plato and Aristotle are included in the endnotes of this work.

¹⁸⁹ Danielou & Musurillo, trans., *From Glory to Glory*, 52.

¹⁹⁰ Danielou & Musurillo, trans., *From Glory to Glory*, 23.

The burning bush experience becomes an analogy for the truth of God, manifest as an “ineffable and mysterious illumination,” that will shine on those who continue in virtue in a quiet and peaceful course of life. “For if truth is God and truth is light,” it is virtue that will guide us “to know that light which has reached down even to human nature” (2.20.59). In context this is primarily a reference to the Incarnation, but by application to Moses’ life, it also points toward ontological human being. As Moses was required to remove the sandals from his feet, so the “dead and earthly covering of skins, which was placed around our nature . . . must be removed from the feet of the soul” (2.22,59).

It is clear that the “garments of skin” are not bodily existence per se, for man had a body in Paradise, but animality or biological existence . . . [including] the passions, sexuality, and especially mortality, which are added to the human nature made in the image of God (160 n. 29).

When the garments are taken off, a metaphor for the work of purification (*katharsis*), natural reason will attain the “knowledge of the truth” (2.22,60).

The definition of truth is this: not to have a mistaken apprehension of Being. So, whoever applies himself in quietness to higher philosophical matters over a long period of time will barely apprehend what true Being is, that is, what possesses existence in its own nature, and what nonbeing is, that is, what is existence only in appearance, with no self-subsisting nature . . . Moses . . . came to know that none of those things which are apprehended by sense perception and contemplated by the understanding really subsists, but that the transcendent essence and cause of the universe, on which everything depends, alone subsists. For even if the understanding looks upon any other existing things, reason observes in absolutely none of them the self-sufficiency by which they could exist without participating in true Being. On the other hand, that which is always the same, neither increasing nor diminishing, immutable to all change . . . standing in need of nothing else, alone desirable, participated in by all but not lessened by their participation – this is truly real Being. And the apprehension of it is the knowledge of truth (2.23-25,60 & nn. 32-37, cf. Aristotle *Metaphysics* 12 & Plato *Timaeus* 38c, *Phaedrus* 247d, *Sophist* 260c, *Symposium* 211ab, *Republic* 380d).

Gregory frequently uses the expression *ho ontos on*, I am He who is, as definition of self-sufficient God, the only ontological being. All else, but surely in particular the image, can exist only by participation in true being, the divine nature. Immediately after this profound philosophical insight Gregory weds it to revelation, making divine nature knowable in the context of *oikonomia*, through the person of the Son who transformed

humanity into divinity by living participation: “What is mutable and subject to passions was transformed into impassibility through its participation in the immutable” (2.30,61).

After such free use of the categories of secular learning, a statement of value is in order and Gregory does not disappoint.

There are certain things derived from profane education which should not be rejected when we propose to give birth to virtue. Indeed moral and natural philosophy may become at certain times a comrade, friend, and companion of life to the higher way (2.37,62-63, cf. 2.115, 81, where secular subjects are cited as “useful when in time the divine sanctuary of mystery must be beautified with the riches of reason”).

Pagan learning is, in fact, entirely relevant to the exercise of virtue, since it provides the useful discipline of reason, a first step in the training required to receive the illumination of and maintain communion in the divine.

If, then, one should withdraw from those who seduce him to evil and by the use of his reason turn to the better . . . it is as if he places his own soul, like a mirror, face to face with the hope of good things, with the result that the images and impressions of virtue, as it is shown to him by God, are imprinted on the purity of his soul (2.47,65).

The aim is to turn away from the state of enslavement that results from evil’s seduction towards “a life philosophical and free” (2.63,68). The free life is made a possibility when the soul gazes “face to face” on the divine persons. As in Plotinus and Basil, this requires synergy, the working together of the grace of God and human endeavour. “The mysterious relation between grace and free will in this process was such that either could be seen as having achieved salvation, but not apart from the other.”¹⁹¹

For truly the assistance which God gives to our nature is provided to those who correctly live the life of virtue. This assistance was already there at our birth, but it is manifested and made known whenever we apply ourselves to diligent training in the higher life and strip ourselves for the more vigorous contests (2.44,64).

Just as the Egyptians rejected Moses’ words of deliverance from slavery and experienced awful plagues, the danger for souls is that they will be so bogged down in “some slimy mire” or great “pile of frogs” that they will not accept liberation from tyranny (2.56,67 & 2.69/72,70, cf. the “mud” in Basil; Plotinus, *Enneads* 1.6.5; 18.13;

6.7.31; Plato, *Phaedrus* 69c; *Republic* 7,533d). Yet as self-determining, “it lies within each person’s power to make this choice” (2.74,71).

As illustrated by another metaphor (an adaptation of Plato’s famous cave metaphor), escaping enslavement is made possible by taking responsibility and making the choice, to either open one’s eyes to the light or to keep them closed.

It is as if someone who has not seen the sun blames it for causing him to fall into the ditch. Yet we do not hold that the luminary in anger pushes into the ditch someone who does not choose to look at it. Rather, we would interpret this statement in a more reasonable manner: It is the failure to participate in the light that causes the person who does not see to fall into the ditch (2.76,71).

For humans have “in ourselves, in our own nature and by our own choice, the causes of light or of darkness, since we place ourselves in whichever sphere we wish to be” (2.80,72). For Gregory, “nothing evil can come into existence apart from our free choice” (2.88,74), so “such sufferings have their origin and cause in ourselves” (2.87,74). “Each man makes his own plagues when through his own free will he inclines toward these painful experiences” (2.86,74).

Living a life of freedom means accepting the empowerment that comes with choosing virtue. It necessarily requires the utter destruction of “the first birth of evil” (2.90,75), “in order that good might come to maturity” (2.101,78). By analogy with the blood placed on the door frame of the Hebrews, preventing the death of the first born, Gregory gives a psychological version of his tripartite nature of soul, which includes three essential components:

the rational (*logistikon*), the appetitive (*epithmetikon*), and the spirited (*thumoeides*). Of these parts we are told that the spirit and the appetite are placed below, supporting on each side the intellectual part of the soul, while the rational aspect is joined to both so as to keep them together and to be held up by them, being trained for courage by the spirit and elevated to the participation in the Good by the appetite (2.96,76).¹⁹²

¹⁹¹ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 130.

¹⁹² If one were to compare modern psychoanalytical theory with Gregory’s tripartite soul, id is the counterpart of appetitive soul – the source of psychic energy derived from instinctual bodily drives; ego of the rational soul – the self, the conscious mediator between the individual and reality, functioning both in perception and in adaptation; and superego of the spirited soul – the unconscious or only partly conscious division that relates to the internalization of parental and societal mores, which functions through moral conscience.

In this Platonic classification “the appetitive part of the soul refers to bodily passions or sensuous desire; the spirited part refers to the ardent spirited will or the nonphysical passions . . .” (169 nn. 116,169, cf. *Republic* 439d, 588b, *Phaedrus* 246b). Both are useful to the exercise of reason, enabling desire for and will towards the good, but both also become instruments of great destruction if natural reason falls from its uppermost position as forming principle (2.98,77).

3.3.2 The Cloud: The Holy Spirit

Those who set out on the life of excellence, having purified themselves of the irrational, will still on occasion find themselves threatened by “temptations [that] pursue them and bring on distress and fears and threats of death” (2.117,81). Then will occur “the manifestation of the divine nature which manifests itself in the way that one is capable of receiving” (2.119,82), i.e., the cloud, or the Holy Spirit, will serve “as guide” (2.121,82). According to Gregory’s analogy, this guide will make a way through the water that threatens to overwhelm and safely lead to freedom, providing refreshment and fruits for life along the way.

In the metaphor, the chariots of the Egyptian army are the various passions that pursue the tripartite soul (2.122-123,83, cf. Plato’s charioteer in *Phaedrus*, 253c). “Since the passions naturally pursue our nature, we must put to death in the water both the base movements of the mind and the acts which issue from them” (2.125,84), drowning “every form of evil” (2.126,84). If someone still serves the “fierce and raging master” of “uncontrolled passion” after passing through the water filled with the regenerating Holy Spirit, Gregory says, “according to my thinking he has not at all touched the mystical water whose function is to destroy evil tyrants” (2.129,85).

The analogy progresses to the stations in the desert where first, Moses placed the wood in the bitter water to make it sweet. The wood becomes the cross of Incarnation, the beginning of hope for “the mystery of the resurrection,” and the sweet water becomes “the virtuous life, being sweetened by the hope of things to come” (2.132,86). The oasis in the desert becomes the church established in history by relation with the Holy Spirit, with twelve refreshing springs representing the twelve chosen disciples and the seventy fruitful date palm trees representing additional apostles (2.134,86). At each campsite of

virtue where the cloud of the Holy Spirit provides rest, “the person following the pillar of cloud is refreshed as he presses on” (2.135,86). The manna, in which all shared equally according to their need, represents the virtue of contentment (2.143,89). The Preparation for the Sabbath becomes the “present life in which we prepare for ourselves the things of the life to come” (2.144,89). The Sabbath is the “complete rest” from the works of life, in which “we acquire the fruits of the seeds” which have been planted “in the field of the spirit” (2.145,89). The whole desert journey becomes one of “spiritual contemplation,” of becoming “capable of receiving” the Holy Spirit who “flows into those who receive him,” of conversation with the persons of God who make a “home” with “those who are thirsty” (2.136,87).

One who perseveres through the desert with the aid of the Holy Spirit advances to the higher levels of virtue, “the contemplation of the transcendent nature” (2.153,92) and “the ineffable knowledge of God” (2.152,91). Fixing one’s gaze on ontological being (2.154,92) or the “contemplation of the intelligibles” (*ta noeta*, 2.156,93) is the equivalent of *theoria*, insight that surpasses “the knowledge which originates with the senses” (2.156,93). It is spiritual intuition which goes beyond even “that reality which is perceived by mind and reason alone” (175 n. 179, cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 247CD & *Timaeus* 27D-28A). “The contemplation of God is not effected by sight and hearing, nor is it comprehended by any of the customary perceptions of the mind” (2.157,93). This “knowledge of God is a mountain steep indeed and difficult to climb” (2.158,93). It is acquired only by purification, by assaulting the mountain (2.157,93 cf. Plotinus *Enneads* 1.6.4), and by ascending into the heart of darkness.

3.3.3 The Darkness: Going Beyond Oneself

Although it may seem like entering the darkness is in contradiction to receiving and participating in the light of God, in fact, it is progression, moving beyond the simple truth that reason provides to more nearly apprehend the reality of God’s divine unknowability (2.162,95). It is where the personal God becomes ‘known’ in the experience of intimate communion.

Leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, [the mind] keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence’s yearning for understanding it gains access to the

invisible and the incomprehensible and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of . . . luminous darkness (2.163,95).

The quote illustrates the progression of ascent as it moves through four stages: first, the knowledge of God that comes from what sense comprehends – the observation of the created material world; second, *perinoia* or knowledge dependent on human intelligence and conjecture; third, *theoria*, contemplation that leaves behind both sensation and ordinary intelligence and, moved by a deep yearning, goes deep inside oneself in a movement that also takes one outside oneself; and fourth, *theologia*, the intimate knowledge that comes from slipping into the “inner sanctuary” and discovering there the touch of God that makes the darkness radiant (2.167,96 & 163 n. 51; 193-195,177).

The movement is dependent on a radical apophaticism. Invisible, incomprehensible, unattainable, unknown, unseen (2.161-169): these are the adjectives that Gregory uses to describe the reality being sought. One is required to give up all preconceptions and ideas about God as “approximate understandings” and “guessings” (2.165,96); to recognize that there is only one thing that can “be known about God, namely, that none of those things known by human comprehension is to be ascribed to him” (2.166,96); to accept that “all names have equally fallen short of accurate description” (2.176,99). Only then can one be initiated into the mysteries of the God “who made darkness his hiding place” (2.164,95).

What Moses saw in the darkness was the “heavenly tabernacle” of the Incarnation, (2.174,98), the “archetype” that was reproduced “in a handmade structure” (2.170,97). When we “had lost our existence through our thoughtlessness,” the “Only Begotten God . . . pitched his own tabernacle among us,” i.e., “consented to be born like us so that it might bring that which had left reality back again to reality” (2.175,98-99).

In Gregory’s allegory, every detail of the earthly tabernacle in the wilderness becomes a symbol of heavenly realities functioning in *oikonomia*, making the persons of God known to humans. The ark of the covenant is the “Face” of God (2.181,100). “The interconnecting courts which surround the tabernacle are fittingly understood as the harmony, love, and peace of believers” in communion with each other (2.186,102). The pillars of silver and gold, the poles, and the rings that support the structure are the

celestial beings who provide personal aid to “those being saved” (2.180,100). “He who would be a priest to God” must personally “bring his own body to the altar and become a sacrifice, not by being put to death, but by being a living sacrifice and rational service” (2.191,103). The priestly vestments are the “adornment of the soul woven by virtuous pursuits” (2.190,103) by which “reweaving,” our “bodily nature” becomes as “light and airy” and “thin as the thread of a spider web” (2.191,104). The pomegranate, with its hard rind and sweet inner nourishment, is one of Gregory’s favourite images for virtue, (183, n. 264) since “the philosophical life, although outwardly austere and unpleasant, is yet full of . . . hidden beauty” (2.193,104). It is therefore quite natural that “the golden bells alternating with the pomegranates” on the hem of the airy tunic would “represent the brilliance of good works . . . through which virtue is acquired” in two ways, “namely, faith toward the divine and conscience toward life” (2.192,104). The straps tying the priestly ornaments hanging over the heart to the arms represent the same two ways of obtaining virtue, here expressed as “the higher life, namely that practical philosophy should be joined to contemplative philosophy. So the heart becomes the symbol of contemplation, and the arms, of works” (2.200,106). The whole “tabernacle of mystery” is thus a work of contemplation, a function of the mind (*katanoesis*, observation of truth) rather than a function of sense (*katalepsis*, taking possession); it is “apprehension of the realities above comprehension” (2.188,103).

The careful restoring of the broken tablets of stone and their placement within the ark or “Face” lead to “some perception of the divine concern for us” (2.215,110) that brought about the Incarnation. For, like Moses, God initially “cut the tables of human nature for himself from our earth” (2.216,110).

Human nature at its beginning was unbroken and immortal. Since human nature was fashioned by the divine hands and beautified with the unwritten characters of the Law, the intention of the Law lay in our nature in turning us away from evil and in honoring the divine (2.215,110).

After the “tables fell to the earth and were broken” (2.216,110), the Son “became the stonecutter of his own flesh, which was carved by the divine finger.” Thus “our nature regained its unbroken character, becoming immortal through the letters written by his finger” (the Holy Spirit, 2.216,111), and in this way God “restored the broken tablet

of our nature to its original beauty” (2.217,111). This fertile image of God writing on human material in creation and in re-creation, inscribing ‘the intention of the law’ in human nature as God’s own way of life, again demonstrates Gregory’s conviction that true human nature is the supernatural, immortal life of communion as lived by divine persons.

The heart of the treatise is Moses’ experience of seeing God “face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (2.219,111,cf. Exodus 33.11). God first

affirms that what the petitioner seeks cannot be contained by human life. Still, God says there is a place with himself where there is a rock with a hole in it into which he commands Moses to enter. Then God placed his hand over the mouth of the hole and called out to Moses as he passed by. When Moses was summoned, he came out of the hole and saw the back of the One who called him (2.220,112, cf. Ex 33:21-23).

Gregory’s spiritual sense understands the text to be speaking of the ascent of the soul. Based on the attraction of like to like or of image to archetype, when soul is “released from its earthly attachment, it becomes light and swift for its movement upward, soaring from below up to the heights” (2.224,113).

The nature of the Good attracts to itself those who look to it, the soul rises ever higher and will always make its flight yet higher – by its desire of the heavenly things straining ahead for what is still to come . . . Made to desire and not to abandon the transcendent height by the things already attained, it makes its way upward without ceasing, ever through its prior accomplishments renewing its intensity for the flight. Activity directed toward virtue causes its capacity to grow through exertion (2.225-26,113, cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* 246b, 249a, 255c & *Theaetetus* 176a).

In the analogy, the ascent is like climbing a ladder. Because of the “infinite nature of God” (185, n. 310), as Moses climbed upwards “he always found a step higher than the one he had attained” (2.227,113, cf. Plato, *Symposium* 211c, Plotinus, *Enn.*

1.6.1,20). After all the experiences of God’s presence in Egypt and in the desert, Moses

still thirsts for that with which he constantly filled himself to capacity, and he asks to attain as if he had never partaken, beseeching God to appear to him, not according to his capacity to partake, but according to God’s true being (2.230,114).

Now here is a critical moment for Gregory's thesis: "True Being is true life. This Being is inaccessible to knowledge" (2.235,115). As already stated, for both Plotinus and the Cappadocians, God is 'knowable' only in the experience of intimate communion.

Such an experience seems to me to belong to the soul which loves what is beautiful. Hope always draws the soul from the beauty which is seen to what is beyond, always kindles the desire for the hidden through what is constantly perceived. Therefore, the ardent lover of beauty, although receiving what is always visible as an image of what he desires, yet longs to be filled with the very stamp of the archetype. And the bold request which goes up the mountains of desire asks this: to enjoy the Beauty not in mirrors and reflections, but face to face (2.231-32,114-15, cf. Plato, *Symposium* 201d).

Just as in any life-giving relationship between loving human persons, the true vision of God entails "never to be satisfied in the desire to see him" (2.239,116). The difference is in intensity of experience. "The Divine is by its nature life-giving" (2.234,115), "infinite" (2.236,115), "Beauty" (2.232,114), and "Good" (2.237,116). The best human relationship, while profoundly real for existential experience, is merely a shadow of the life given in relationship with the divine.

God makes the ascent "easy" with the invitation: "Here is a place beside me" (2.241,117, Ex 33.21), an infinite place "so great that the one running in it is never able to cease from his progress" (2.242,117). Yet the running is really a paradox for, in a sense, the movement is also "a standing still" on the rock. "I mean by this that the firmer and the more immovable one remains in the Good, the more he progresses in the course of virtue" (2.243,117). Those who are not resolute in will toward virtue are not on the rock but stuck in the sand or the mud, yet it remains in their power to choose otherwise, even to fly upwards like a bird.

The man who in his reasonings is uncertain and liable to slip, since he has no firm grounding in the Good but is tossed one way and another and carried along . . . and is doubtful and wavers in his opinions concerning reality, would never attain to the height of virtue. He is like those who toil endlessly as they climb uphill in sand: Even though they take long steps, their footing in the sand always slips downhill, so that, although there is much motion, no progress results from it. But if someone . . . should pull his [own] feet up from the mud of the pit and plant them upon the rock (the rock is Christ who is absolute virtue) then the more steadfast and unmoveable . . . he becomes in the Good the faster he completes the course. It is like using the standing still as if it were a wing while the heart flies upward through its stability in the good (2.243-44,117-18).

Later in the treatise, the bird is depicted as a lofty eagle, whose wings indeed often seem to stand still while it soars high above, as if unattached to the earth (2.307,133).

The hole in the rock could just as easily be called “a heavenly house” (2.245,118), a place of living together in communion, or the house in which “all the treasures of good things” are to be found (2.248,118), all of which are metaphors for Christ. Authentic human nature is, for humans, knowable through knowing God in the relational person of Jesus Christ. It is doable only by becoming relational oneself, by participation in Incarnate life, by placing oneself within the rock of divinity. “He who finds any good finds it in Christ who contains all good,” for the Incarnate Son, “the creative power of what exists,” is the “‘place’ for those who run, . . . the ‘way’ of the course, . . . the ‘rock’ to those who are well established and ‘house’ to those who are resting” (2.248-49,118-19).

Gregory introduces some supplementary texts to add to the spiritual sense of Moses’ experience of seeing God. When the Psalm writer spoke of him “who dwells in the shelter of the most High; He will overshadow you with his shoulders” (cf. Psalm 91:1,4), this “is the same as being behind God” (2.250,119). In another Psalm, the writer says, “My soul clings close to you, your right hand supports me” (cf. Psalm 63.8); this becomes “the hand [that] touches the person who waits in the rock” (2.250,119, cf. Plotinus). As Plotinus already noted, experiencing the ‘touch’ of the divine is the high point of the relationship. Responding to that touch of God, Moses eagerly presses in close to the back of God and is

taught how he can behold Him: to follow God wherever he might lead is to behold God . . . for someone who does not know the way cannot complete his journey safely in any other way than by following behind his guide (2.252,119).

Gregory’s conclusion is that the vision of God in darkness is best described as an instinctual and continuous turning toward the person of Christ with loving desire, opening oneself to intimate communion. It is a steadfast face to face filling of one’s eyes with the other person in order to become like the adored (188 n. 362, cf. Plato, *Phaedrus* myth). This is image finding its source and becoming authentic.

In summary then, the one purpose in human life is to make continual progress into the perfection of divine life, in order “to be known by God and to become his friend”

(2.320,137). The journey of “ascent up the mountain” begins with purity, i.e., nakedness from evil (194 n. 440), which in turn allows instruction in “divine mystery” and the drawing near to God “in impenetrable darkness.” This is giving birth to oneself; this is becoming the sculptor, carving in one’s own heart the divine virtues that are the “proper nature” of human beings (2.315-316,135).

For he who has truly come to be in the image of God and who has in no way turned aside from the divine character bears in himself its distinguishing marks and shows in all things his conformity to the archetype; he beautifies his own soul with what is incorruptible, unchangeable, and shares in no evil at all (2.318,136).

Then the voice of the divine person who also longs for this communion will say: “I have known you more than all others” (2.319,137). This friendship of persons divine and human is “true perfection” (2.320,137).

3.4 Conclusion

To be a human, as Gregory demonstrated with compelling thoroughness in supplying what is missing from Basil’s purposeful creation, is to be constituted as an integral unity of mind and body, dignified and royal, highly exalted and self-governing. It is to be a living image with the divine mind, the principle of all excellence, wisdom and virtue, implanted in and operating through the sense faculties of the body. Laying claim to the image as ruler means freely accepting empowerment for virtue and, concomitantly, choosing the true human vocation. Gregory provides the answer to Plotinus’ mysterious communion by providing a concrete and practical way for the human to develop a dynamic and relational mode of divine being. The ascent to the divine life starts with self-determination and self-organization but it is a self necessarily subject to the morality and the freedom of divine persons, a reality that transcends individuality.

Evil by contrast (and in agreement with Plotinus) begins with withdrawal from participation in the divine into isolated self-will, particularity, and egoism. It follows that, from such a perspective, the ego is a vanishing point. The limitations of evil allow for a plausible theory of the return of all createdness to its source. There is no limitation in divine being (who literally is without any boundary), who continually and lovingly gives of divine life. This allows for a communion of perpetual ascent into the goodness of God’s being (*epektasis*).

Truth, for Gregory, consists in apprehending that true being alone possesses existence in its own nature, participated in by all without being lessened, inaccessible to knowledge. Human beingness is participation in existence, which experience of communion enables an experiential form of knowing without cognition. The Incarnation is God given a face, carefully restoring human nature to its original and intended beauty by bringing it outside of itself into God's mode of being. The one purpose in human life is to make continual progress into the perfection of divine life, in order to experience God face to face and by touch, to be known by God personally and to become God's friend. But this single purpose embraces the whole of created reality and all its instincts and aspirations.

One can identify some unresolved issues in Gregory's thought from this chapter. The influence of Platonic dualism appears in some analogies, where the body is portrayed as instrumental to and separable from soul. Related to these vestiges of dualism is the fact that, although the Cappadocians were highly incarnational and, as Gregory aptly demonstrated, even used sexual intercourse as a metaphor for communion with God, it seems that they could not break through cultural barriers to imagine that loving sexual *ekstasis* could be part of the operation of the image of God in humans. Thus Gregory is required by his own restraints to reconstruct the creation story.

Gregory began to develop the relationship of the passions to the soul, a concern given much attention in patristic theology. As well, he introduced the idea of return of all creation to source or *apokatastasis*. We will see that Macrina's amplification of these topics relate particularly to issues surrounding death, as she expands on themes already noted in the Cappadocians and provides further fleshly enhancement to the soulful existence that Plotinus portrayed.

CHAPTER FOUR: MACRINA c. 327 – 379.

4.1 A Life of Excellence

Information specific to Macrina's life and thought can be derived from two works written by her younger brother, Gregory of Nyssa, together entitled "The Macrina Works," specifically *Vita Sanctae Macrinae (VSM)* and *De Anima et Resurrectione (DAR)*.¹⁹³ They deserve to be treated on their own since in these texts Macrina speaks in the first person. Her voice supplies what is still missing in the Cappadocian theory of the human vocation, as it is Macrina who faces death. Her words serve to supplement the thought of Gregory of Nyssa as outlined above, particularly in relation to bodily resurrection and *apokatastasis*. As appropriate for the time period, the most complete picture of the organic family unit becomes visible with disclosure of the female – not just any female, but one whose historical life is presented as most nearly embodying the Cappadocian philosophy of persons in communion.

Macrina was the older sister of Basil and Gregory, the first of ten children born to St. Basil the Elder and St. Emmelia. Formally named after her devout paternal grandmother, her secret name was Thekla. Both names predict a life of Christian piety.¹⁹⁴ She describes her mother as a great beauty, "so virtuous a person that she let herself be led by the will of God in everything and had embraced an exceptionally pure and spotless way of life" (*VSM* 20). Her father was well thought of in "the law-courts of his own land," with a "mastery of rhetoric" beyond everyone else, and "glad to be widely recognized in his own country" (*VSM* 37). Of import is the fact that her father died in 340, prior to the birth of her youngest sibling, Peter, for whom she assumed responsibility

¹⁹³ DAR is found in *Gregory Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. The source used for VSM is Gregory of Nyssa's *Life of Saint Macrina*, trans. Kevin Corrigan.

¹⁹⁴ Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, 462. According to the apocryphal *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, the faithful virgin to whom St. Paul entrusted his apostolic ministry. Sometimes called a dubious saint, since information regarding her life is legendary, but other times titled an intellectual leader and strong personality; the first woman martyr.

as “father, teacher, guide, mother” (*VSM* 29), providing such excellent spiritual direction that he eventually became Bishop at Sebaste. Indeed it seems that Macrina, despite her twelve short years, had already developed a strong mind and a certain resolution,¹⁹⁵ and at her father’s death she quite naturally became the center of this large and gifted family which owned property in three provinces. Previously their lifestyle had reflected their status but soon after her father’s death she persuaded her mother to simplify. Although they began to treat the servants as equals, thorough education of the children remained a high priority. Macrina herself, in addition to caring for her siblings, engaged in household tasks such as spinning and baking bread. She and her mother are described as companions, with “a true exchange realised” (*VSM* 23) in their friendship and partnership, her mother supporting Macrina’s choices of purity and Macrina drawing her mother towards detachment from what is material in the governance of their property (*VSM* 24 & 63, n. 28). His younger brother Gregory mischievously tells us that when Basil came home from years of studying at Athens, “monstrously conceited about his skill in rhetoric, contemptuous of every high reputation and exalted beyond the leading lights of the province by his self-importance,” it was Macrina who gently persuaded him to “the ideal of philosophy” (*VSM* 24). In fact, it is Gregory’s goal in telling her story “that she who had raised herself through philosophy to the highest limit of human virtue should not pass along this way veiled and in silence” (*VSM* 20). Gregory consistently calls her “the teacher” (*didascalía*), from which we can infer that this “family of distinguished advocates, philosophers, theologians and bishops” (*VSM* 14) regularly referred their questions to her. The younger brother confesses her ability “to correct with the curb of her reasonings the disorder of my soul” (*DAR* 430a).

Around the year 352, having dispersed inheritances, Macrina and her mother founded a convent at Annesi on the Iris, near the monastery founded by her brother Naucratus, possibly across the river from Basil’s retreat. Gregory tells us their “mode of existence” was

in a community whose way of life lay at the boundaries between human nature and the nature which is without body . . . For to have freed nature from human passions was a feat beyond human strength, while to appear in body, to be

¹⁹⁵ Upon the death of her fiancé, Macrina had steadfastly refused, against the wishes of her parents, to entertain other suitors, devoting herself rather to Christian asceticism. Biographical data is from Nyssa, *Life of St. Macrina*, trans. Corrigan, 5-14, and Farmer, *Dictionary of Saints*, 319.

encompassed by bodily shape and to live with the organs of sense was thereby to possess a nature inferior to that of the angelic and the incorporeal. Perhaps one might even go so far as to say that the difference was minimal, because, although they lived in the flesh, by virtue of their affinity with the incorporeal powers they were not weighed down by the attractive pull of the body, but their lives were borne upwards, poised on high and they took their souls' flight in concert with the heavenly powers. The time spent in such a way of life was not short and their accomplishments increased with time, since philosophy always granted them an abundance of help in the discovery of good things which led them on to greater purity (*VSM* 28-29).

Upon her mother's death in 370, she gave away all remaining possessions. Shortly after Basil's death, Gregory made an unannounced visit, the first in eight years, to find Macrina on her deathbed. Their conversation on death and resurrection is eloquently recorded in *DAR*, while her life and passage beyond death are celebrated in *VSM*.

4.2 Divine Being & Created World

Macrina speaks of God in the now-familiar terms of Neoplatonism, as the "uncreate prototype" of which human mind is the image. The divine is the "pure and infinite existence," which cannot be brought down to the "level of that which is perishable and little" (*DAR* 437a). As the "Supreme Being" (449a), it is "the fountain of all virtue" (452a), the "Good," the "Original Beauty," (449a). It is the "truly-existent" (450a) and, therefore, ontological being.

In keeping with her apophatic tradition, Macrina expands the description of the Good.

A Nature like that, which transcends all thought and is far removed from all that we observe within ourselves, proceeds in its existence in a very different manner to what we do in this present life. . . . A nature that surpasses every idea that we can form of the Good and transcends all other power, being in no want of anything that can be regarded as good, is itself the plenitude of every good; . . . it is itself the substance of the Good (whatever we imagine the Good to be) . . . (449b)

Now since "to the good the good is an object of love, it follows that when It looks within Itself, it wishes for what It contains and contains that which It wishes, and admits nothing external" (450a), being complete in itself. As divine it is also immutable, i.e., it "is in its

essence incapable of a change for the worse,” so “will go on unchecked into infinity” (450b).

As Beauty, divine being is a “state of purity . . . in very substance Beautiful . . . essentially capable of attracting in a certain way every being that looks toward it” (449a) and “necessarily lovable to those who recognize it” (450b), for “love clings by natural affinity to the Beautiful” (450a).

By way of these deductions, Macrina can identify essential being as love. For while goodness is the object of every virtuous desire and true recognition affirms that pure goodness is beautiful, the essence that lies beyond either of those pre-eminent attributes embraces “the plenitude of things which are . . . [as] the stamp of God’s actual blessedness” (450b). So expressed very simply then, the life of this “Supreme Being is love” (450b), “being always as it is” (450a). She defines love as “the inherent affection towards a chosen object” (450a) that also attracts the chosen to itself. It is hard to conceive of anything more relational, more desirous of communion.

“The Cause of all things is one . . . Divine Being” (458a). It is impossible to say how a world of matter came into being; one merely observes that

the movement of God’s will becomes at any moment that He pleases a fact, and the intention becomes at once realized in Nature, for Omnipotence does not leave the plans of its far-seeing skill in the state of unsubstantial wishes; and the actualizing of a wish is substance (458a, cf. Psalm 19).

Actually, the world itself is an argument against the idea that there is no transcendent God or even that it bears no relation to God, according to Macrina. Here again, as in Plotinus, Basil, and Gregory, we get strong statements of a power inherent in all things, comprehending all that is into a sympathetic union.

The creation proclaims outright the Creator; for the very heavens . . . declare the glory of God with their unutterable words. We see the universal harmony in the wondrous sky and on the wondrous earth; how elements essentially opposed to each other are all woven together in an ineffable union to serve one common end, each contributing its particular force to maintain the whole (433a).

Observe how water, contrary to its nature, moves upwards when vaporized by the sun’s rays, and how rain infused into the one soil generates a myriad of different life-forms. By many other examples from creation, one should

be taught that a Divine power, working with skill and method, is manifesting itself in this actual world, and, penetrating each portion, combines those portions with the whole and completes the whole by the portions, and encompasses the universe with a single all-controlling force, self-centred and self-contained, never ceasing from its motion, yet never altering the positions which it holds (433a)

Note that, for Macrina, ‘things’ fall into two categories: the intelligible or incorporeal, which “verge closely” with spiritual Being in a characteristic “absence of tangible form and dimension”; and the corporeal, which has “nothing in common with the Deity” (458a). Divine being perpetually penetrates and encompasses all things in both categories (432b), “and by this penetration of the whole keeps the world in a state of being” (445a).

4.3 Human Being as Microcosm

The corporeal constitution of human being is as follows: “man is a little world in himself and contains all the elements which go to complete the universe” (433a). Can we know how this came about? “The Deity proceeded by a sort of graduated and ordered advance to the creation of man” (441b), beginning with inanimate creation, then moving on to the second division of existing things, animate beings or those “possessed of life.” All animate creation is characterized by “appetite,” i.e., “an instinct acquisitive of the necessities to material existence” (441b). Within the animate yet another classification exists, that of the insensate and the sentient. God deliberately intensified “the vital forces” in conjunction with the “gradation”: plants are basic, innately deriving nourishment and producing growth and fruit but remaining insensate; animals build on vegetative life, operating by means of natural impulses implanted in them, e.g., fear and anger; last of all, human life is identified by a “peculiar gift,” the “faculty of reason and thought” (442a), “the choice product” (441b) which “bears the stamp of Divine character.” This last creation is thus microcosm: “one who took up into himself every single form of life, both that of plants and that which is seen in brutes” (442a); a “composite” body (431b) formed of atoms by a “coalition of elements” (431b) found also in the inanimate world, characterized by the appetites of the animate world, and “knit up with” (442a) the sense perceptions that characterize animal life.

Yet the creation of human being surpasses all others by virtue of “a certain force of intelligence present in each organ of the senses” (434a). The presence of intelligence is what positions human being “on the boundary line between the ‘intelligible’ [*noetos*] world and the ‘empirical’ [*aisthetos*] world.”¹⁹⁶ In relation to the body, it makes us aware

that not one of those things which we attribute to body is itself body; neither figure, nor colour, nor weight, nor extension, nor quantity, nor any other qualifying notion whatever; but every one of them is a category; it is the combination of them all into a single whole that constitutes body (458b).

The “qualifications which complete the particular body are grasped by thought alone, and not by sense;” it is “thinkables whose mutual combination generates *for us* the substance of that body” (458b).

4.4 Mind-Soul vs. Sensations-Emotions-Passions

The beginning of Macrina’s argument in *De Anima et Resurrectione* is that this “intellectual essence deeply seated in our nature, acting through the operation of our bodily senses” (434b), as the animating force of the “reasoning animal man” (439b), is the incorporeal mind-soul that images God, that ‘verges closely’ with spiritual Being. This “intelligent and undimensional essence which we call soul” (437b) coheres with the atoms which unite to form the body. So the natural state of human being is to be possessed of a “soul that derives its constitution from God” and thus

is removed from any necessity of being vicious; that nevertheless, though this is the condition in which it came into being, it can be attracted of its own free will in a chosen direction, either wilfully shutting its eyes to the Good, or letting them be damaged . . . or reversely, preserving undimmed its sight of the Truth and keeping far away from all weaknesses that could darken it (457b).

“In the compound which results from the joining of both (soul and body) there is a simultaneous passage of both into existence” (459a). The foetus is a living being gifted with soul and capable of drawing nourishment, even though it

cannot contain at first all the activities and the movements of the soul. . . . The advance to perfection is a graduated one, so in man’s formation the forces of his soul show themselves in proportion to the size to which his body has attained (459a).

¹⁹⁶ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 121, using terminology from *Oratio* 38.11.

Development begins with nutrition, to which is first added perception¹⁹⁷ and later, reason.

But if soul is the essence of human nature, what is soul exactly? In Macrina's opinion, it is an "immaterial and spiritual" (433b) organizing principle that we know of "owing to the activities which it displays to us" (436a). It is

an essence created, and living, and intellectual, transmitting from itself to an organized and sentient body the power of living and of grasping objects of sense, as long as a natural constitution capable of this holds together (433b).

"By virtue of a nature which is formless and bodiless it is present with the body equally in the contraction and in the diffusion of its atoms" (438a). There is no separation in space of soul within body, i.e., it is not present in any one specific organ of the body, e.g., the brain or the heart, but equally in each and every atom that united forms the body.

Embodied souls actually require sensations or emotions to maintain their form of existence; used constructively, emotions are the building blocks of human life.

Those phenomena within us that we call 'passions' . . . have not been allotted to human nature for any bad purpose at all (for the Creator would most certainly be the author of evil, if in them, so deeply rooted as they are in our nature, any necessities of wrong-doing were found), but according to the use which our free will puts them to, these [instinctive] emotions of the soul become the instruments of virtue or of vice (442a).

The task of soul is to be "a competent instructress" (433b) to the existential human, bringing to fruition by "the good employment" of the emotions (449a) the "excellence in the soul" that is the "property of divine nature" (439b). For Macrina, the "most beautiful ornament that life has to give is virtue" (431b), made manifest as "the soul copies the life that is above, and is conformed to the peculiar features of the Divine nature" (450a).

Useful as they may be to soul, the emotions (also called passions or sensations or affections) are external to rather than intrinsic within the soul (440b). Anger may be called an "impulse to hurt one who has provoked us" or "an eagerness to inflict pain in

¹⁹⁷ Dillard, *Pilgrim*, 14-34, includes a wonderful exploration of how humans born blind do not develop a sense of form, distance or size and therefore no idea of the 'reality' of space; how humans see within the range of only about thirty percent of the light that comes from the sun, excluding infrared and ultraviolet; how a self-conscious sifting of values arises with sight; how seeing is a "matter of verbalization" due to relentless brain chatter; how, in all organisms larger than the one-celled, sense impressions are edited by ganglia without our knowledge before they ever reach the brain. She concludes that true seeing is perhaps "less like seeing than like being for the first time seen, knocked breathless by a powerful glance."

return for a previous pain” (440b). Similarly desire is “a seeking for that which is wanting, or a longing for pleasurable enjoyment, or a pain at not possessing that upon which the heart is set . . .” (440b). These conditions lead to others which are “mutually opposed,” e.g., pleasure is their “leading motive” while pain results when the fulfilment being sought is thwarted.¹⁹⁸ These conditions “are not the soul, but only like warts growing out of the soul’s thinking part, which are reckoned as parts of it because they adhere to it, and yet are not that actual thing which the soul is in its essence” (440b). Yet like warts, they can root themselves deep in the soul and become nearly inextricable. Macrina admits, it is “hard for the soul to get rid of [the passions], when they have infused themselves into the very substance of its entire nature and become one with it” (468b).

There are three reasons why we ought not think of principles such as anger or desire to be “consubstantial with” or “inherent in” (439a) human nature (soul), according to Macrina. First, by definition, an “essence” is that “which is peculiar” (440a) or “that thing only which it is” (440b). Since we have already established that the principle of sensation is “common” to both humans and animals, as also “nutrition” is common to all life forms, these principles cannot be part of the essence of human soul (440a).

Furthermore, we know of humans, like the pre-eminent Moses, who engaged in “a battle of the reason with [the passions] and a struggle to rid the soul of them” (440a) and succeeded. “This could not have been so, if these faculties were nature, and were referable to the contents of man’s essence” (440a). But did we not establish that the soul needs the emotions as instruments directed toward the good? If “the principle of desire” that draws us near to God is extinguished, will we still participate in divine life? When we have been purified and “every unreasoning instinct is quenched within us” (449a), then we will experience the fulfilment of our desire, the immediacy of divine embrace.

The speculative and critical faculty is the property of the soul’s godlike part; for it is by these that we grasp the Deity also. If then . . . our soul becomes free from any emotional connection with the brute creation, there will be nothing to impede its contemplation of the Beautiful; for this last is essentially capable of attracting in a certain way every being that looks toward it. If, then, the soul is purified of every vice, it will most certainly be in the sphere of Beauty. The Deity is in very

¹⁹⁸ The opposition of pain and pleasure in human experience becomes part of the comprehensive work of 7th century Maximus the Confessor, who follows in the tradition of the Cappadocians and further develops their philosophy.

substance Beautiful; and to the Deity the soul will in its state of purity have affinity, and will embrace It as like itself. Whenever this happens, then, there will be no longer need of the impulse of Desire to lead the way to the Beautiful. Whoever passes his time in darkness, he it is who will be under the influence of a desire for the light; but whenever he comes into the light, then enjoyment takes the place of desire, and the power to enjoy renders desire useless and out of date. It will therefore be no detriment to our participation in the Good, that the soul should be free from such emotions, and turning back upon herself should know herself accurately what her actual nature is, and should behold the Original Beauty reflected in the mirror and in the figure of her own beauty. For truly herein consists the real assimilation to the Divine; viz. in making our own life in some degree a copy of the Supreme Being (449a-b).

Third, as just noted, emotions are not found in God – “in the Beauty which is man’s prototype no such characteristics are to be found” (441a) – not because they contradict any essential goodness of divine being, but because they are simply a means toward the Good which is Divine being. Because they are not in divine essence, they are not in human essence, since “anything foreign to God is outside the limits of soul; similarity cannot be retained in those qualities which are diverse from the original” (439b).

Succinctly then, here is the difference between mind or soul and the affective sensations or emotions.

We declare, then, that the speculative, critical, and world-surveying faculty of the soul is its peculiar property by virtue of its very nature . . . Our reason surmises that divinity itself, whatever it may be in its inmost nature, is manifested in these very things, – universal supervision and the critical discernment between good and evil (441a).

Emotions, which “lie on the border-land” (441a) of soul and are merely “accretions” to human nature,

are like the iron which is being fashioned according to the volition of the artificer, and receives whatever shape the idea which is in his mind prescribes, and becomes a sword or some agricultural implement. Supposing, then, that our reason, which is our nature’s choicest part, holds the dominion over these imported emotions, . . . none of them will be active in the ministry of evil; fear will only generate within us obedience, and anger fortitude, and cowardice caution; and the instinct of desire will procure for us the delight that is Divine and perfect. But if reason drops the reins and is dragged behind like a charioteer who has got entangled in his car, [cf. Plato’s *Phaedrus*] then these instincts are changed into fierceness, just as we see happens amongst the brutes. . . . If these

instincts are not turned by reasoning into the right direction, and if our feelings get the mastery of our mind, the man is changed from a reasoning into an unreasoning being, and from godlike intelligence sinks by the force of these passions to the level of the brute (442a-b).

Macrina is just as emphatic as Basil and Plotinus: the “native inherent power” (443a), the essence of the soul-mind, the “active principle” of human being, is “godlike intelligence.” Although reason has certain limitations, e.g., how the visible can come from the invisible, how the idea of quantity can come from that which has no dimensions, etc. (458b), still, it enables correct judgement, leading in the direction of “the true Beauty which is alone in its intrinsic nature” (442b) and culturing “that natural Beauty which was . . . sown in us” (443a).

Is soul-mind then not actually the same as Deity, if “neither can be thought of, except by the withdrawal of all the data of sense” and if their existence can be known only by their operations (436b)?

The one is *like* the other. For that which is ‘made in the image’ of the Deity necessarily possesses a likeness to its prototype in every respect; it resembles it in being intellectual, immaterial, unconnected with any notion of weight, and in eluding any measurement of its dimensions; yet as regards its own peculiar nature it is something different from that other. Indeed, it would be no longer an ‘image’ if it were altogether identical with that other; but where we have *A* in that uncreate prototype we have *a* in the image; just as in a minute particle of glass, when it happens to face the light, the complete disc of the sun is often to be seen, not represented thereon in proportion to its proper size, but so far as the minuteness of the particle admits of its being represented at all. Thus do the reflections of those ineffable qualities of Deity shine forth within the narrow limits of our nature; and so our reason, following the leading of these reflections, will not miss grasping the Mind in its essence by clearing away from the question all corporeal qualities; . . . It will regard this essence of the Mind as an object of thought only, since it is the ‘image’ of an Existence which is such; but it will not pronounce this image to be identical with the prototype. (437a).

Since souls are not of the same substance as bodies, they have no “sort of communion” with bodies, acting rather as a “vivifying influence” on bodies which continues beyond the dissolution of the atoms which compose them (437a). Souls do have communion with Deity and divine intention is for humans to participate in relational divine being through the “image” capacity.

It was for this that intelligent beings came into existence; namely that the riches of Divine blessing should not lie idle. The All-creating Wisdom fashioned these souls, these receptacles with free wills, as vessels as it were, for this very purpose, that there should be some capacities able to receive His blessings and become continually larger with the inpouring of the stream. Such are the wonders that the participation in the Divine blessings works: it makes him into whom they come larger and more capacious; from his capacity to receive it gets for the receiver an actual increase in bulk as well, and he never stops enlarging. The fountain of blessings wells up unceasingly, and the partaker's nature, finding nothing superfluous and without a use in that which it receives, makes the whole influx an enlargement of its own proportions, and becomes at once more wishful to imbibe the nobler nourishment and more capable of containing it . . . (453a).

4.5 Evil & the Fall

As already noted, divine nature is the “plenitude of every good” (449b) which “admits nothing external” (450a).

Indeed there is nothing external to It, with the sole exception of evil, which strange as it may seem to say, possesses an existence in not existing at all. For there is no other origin of evil except the negation of the existent, and the truly existent forms the substance of the Good. That therefore which is not to be found in the existent must be in the non-existent (450a).

In the original world, “man's life had but one character; and by that I mean that it was to be found only in the category of the good and had no contact with evil” (447a), because evil is the negation of goodness (436a). God's instruction in paradise had been to forbid “only that which was a mixture of good and evil and so composed of contraries” (447a). Death is the necessary consequence of evil since evil is the privation of goodness, a category that includes life (459a).

Man, acting freely by a voluntary impulse, deserted the lot that was unmixed with evil, and drew upon himself that which was a mixture of contraries. Yet Divine Providence did not leave that recklessness of ours without a corrective . . . but God divided the life of man into two parts, namely this present life, and that ‘out of the body’ hereafter; and He placed on the first a limit of the briefest possible time, while He prolonged the other into eternity; and in His love for man He gave him his choice, to have the one or the other of those things, good or evil, I mean, in which of the two parts he liked: either in this short and transitory life, or in those endless ages, whose limit is infinity. (447a).

Macrina understands good and evil to have “two senses, one relating to mind and the other to sense” (447b). If in a historical lifetime reason is left unexercised and choices

are made on the basis of the emotions, i.e., according to what feels good, then one “places the land of the good beyond his own reach; for he has dug against himself the yawning impassable abyss of a necessity that nothing can break through” (447b, cf. Luke 16:19-31). One can expect the breaking of habits like gluttony and selfishness to be somewhat painful, in this part of life or in the next. If, on the other hand, one chooses discretion and sober-mindedness and endures some “present annoyance” for that decision in temporal existence, that “virtuous voyager” will quite naturally be “brought to anchor in the waveless harbour of that gulf of blessings” in the life after death. According to this interpretation, Divine Providence intentionally intervened when humans wilfully abandoned the good, setting death as an outside limit for choices made in this life. But death is not the end of life, rather, it provides a way for life to ultimately prevail and for all to be brought into the “bosom” of goodness (447b).

Sometimes Macrina speaks of evil in another way, i.e., as seducer. There are in the immaterial world created rational beings

divested of such bodies as ours are, who are opposed to that which is good and are capable of hurting the lives of men, having by an act of will lapsed from the nobler view, and by this revolt from goodness personified in themselves the contrary principle (444b).

Although she doesn’t explicitly say so, seduction may be the harm that these evil spirits bring to humans. In this scenario, hope sets its sights on “some phantom only of the Good” (449b) instead of “something intrinsically good.” When

hope has seduced the soul . . . and the excellent way has been missed, then the memory that succeeds what has happened becomes shame, and an intestine war is thus waged in the soul between memory and hope, because the last has been such a bad leader of the will (449b).

Still, there remains in soul the capacity to recognize its mistake; it is “stung” when it discovers that it has set the will on what was disguised as goodness and “remorse for its ill-considered attempt” makes it long for “oblivion” (449b). The original state of freedom now becomes “obscured by the feeling of shame” (452a).

4.6 Death of the Body

Macrina's central doctrine that soul "exists, with a rare and peculiar nature of its own, independently of the body with its gross [or material] texture" (433b), leads to an assertion about "the existence of . . . souls after the life in the flesh" (444a). Since mind in essence has no "corporeal qualities" (437a), it does not "vanish" (437b) with the dissolution of the material body. The atoms do "wander off to their kindred" (438a) but that does not mean that the "domesticated" soul abandons the "familiar form" (445a) of the atoms it has been united with. As "the framework of the body" (437b) in life is such that

each individual part is possessed of a soul which penetrates equally every component member . . . there is nothing against probability that that simple and incomposite essence which has once for all by some inexplicable law grown with the growth of the bodily framework should continually remain beside the atoms with which it has been blended, and should in no way be sundered from a union once formed. For it does not follow that because the composite is dissolved the incomposite must be dissolved with it (437b).

"The intelligent and undimensional" soul, "being by nature incapable of dissolution along with the atoms. . . finds it no labour to cling to what is locally divided . . ." (438a). She

remains with [the atoms], and even in their separation . . . is co-extensive with them . . . The soul exists in the actual atoms which she has once animated, and there is no force to tear her away from her cohesion with them (438a-b).

It is essential to note that in Macrina's philosophic worldview, the matter of the body is not evil. It is, in fact, so good that even the purest soul is attracted to and maintains its union with the body, and even in death. In the section following, it becomes very clear that the weight that pulls the soul downward is an undue attachment to bodily limitations, a category that includes the affections.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁹ Compare with Dillard, *Pilgrim*, 269-70. "I live in tranquility and trembling. Sometimes I dream. I am interested in Alice mainly when she eats the cookie that makes her smaller. I would pare myself or be pared that I too might pass through the merest crack, a gap I know is there in the sky . . . There is not a guarantee in the world. Oh your needs are guaranteed, your needs are absolutely guaranteed by the most stringent of warranties, in the plainest, truest words: knock; seek; ask. But you must read the fine print. "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." That's the catch. If you can catch it it will catch you up, aloft, up to any gap at all, and you'll come back, for you will come back, transformed in a way you may not have bargained for – dribbling and crazed. The waters of separation, however lightly sprinkled, leave indelible stains. Did you think, before you were caught, that you needed, say life? Do you think you will keep your life, or anything else you love? But no. Your needs are all met. But not as the world giveth. You see the needs of

4.7 Purgation

Using the gospel story of Lazarus and the rich man as the illustration (Luke 16:20 f), Macrina shows that the soul possessing an “inordinate attachment” to material pleasures will “be unwilling” to fly away in death (448b). That soul “is still attached, with a cement as it were, even after death, to the life of feeling, which he does not divest himself of even when he has ceased to live” (448a-b). This then is hell, an “unseen and immaterial situation in which the soul resides, . . . still keeping as he does flesh and blood in his thoughts” (449b). In order to avoid it,

those still living in the flesh must as much as ever they can separate and free themselves from its attachments by virtuous conduct, in order that after death they may not need a second death to cleanse them from the remnants that are owing to this cement of the flesh, and, when once the bonds are loosed from around the soul, her soaring up to the Good may be swift and unimpeded, with no anguish of the body to distract her. . . . [For] when the change is made into the impalpable Unseen, not even then will it be possible for the lovers of the flesh to avoid dragging away with them under any circumstances some fleshly foulness; and thereby their torment will be intensified, their soul having been materialized by such surroundings (448b).

Macrina provides an excruciating metaphor to illustrate the process this materialized soul must endure after the death of the body. Suppose a soul

that has been transfixed with the nails of propension so as to be held down to a habit connected with material things, – a case like that of those in the ruins caused by earthquakes, whose bodies are crushed by the mounds of rubbish; and let us imagine by way of illustration that these are not only pressed down by the weight of the ruins, but have been pierced as well with some spikes and splinters discovered with them in the rubbish . What, then, would naturally be the plight of those bodies, when they were being dragged by relatives from the ruins to receive the holy rites of burial, mangled and torn entirely, disfigured in the most direful manner conceivable, with the nails beneath the heap harrowing them by the very violence necessary to pull them out? Such I think is the plight of the soul as well, when the Divine force, for God’s very love of man, drags that which belongs to Him from the ruins of the irrational and material. Not in hatred or revenge for a wicked life, to my thinking, does God bring upon sinners those painful dispensations; He is only claiming and drawing to Himself whatever, to please Him came into existence. . . . In such a manner, I think, we may figure to ourselves the agonized struggle of that soul which has wrapped itself up in earthy material passions, when God is drawing it, His own one, to Himself, and the

your own spirit met whenever you have asked, and you have learned that the outrageous guarantee holds. You see the creatures die, and you know you will die. And one day it occurs to you that you must not need life. Obviously. And then you’re gone.”

foreign matter, which has somehow grown into its substance, has to be scraped from it by main force, and so occasions it that keen intolerable anguish. . . . The Deity . . . operates . . . only to get the good separated from the evil and to attract it into the communion of blessedness (451a-b, cf. Plato's *Phaedo*).

So "the agony will be measured by the amount of evil there is in each individual" will, as in the case of a flame burning "as long as there is fuel to feed it," sometimes with "penetrating fierceness" (451b), until the non-existent is extinguished and goodness alone remains.

In any and every case evil must be removed out of existence, so that . . . the absolutely non-existent should cease to be at all. Since it is not in its nature that evil should exist outside the will, does it not follow that when it shall be that every will rests in God, evil will be reduced to complete annihilation, owing to no receptacle being left for it? (451b)

By the time one reaches it, Macrina's solution to the problem of evil and its consequences seems so agreeable and advisedly simple that the fresh mental image it conjures provides some needed comic relief.

Either we must plan to keep the soul absolutely untouched and free from any stain of evil; or, if our passionate nature makes that quite impossible, then we must plan that our failures in excellence consist only in mild and easily-curable derelictions (452a).

4.8 Divinization of Human Nature

In its very essence human nature is marked by a kinship to God, a likeness that results in the natural force of attraction mutually drawing the soul and the divine together.

As every being is capable of attracting its like, and humanity is, in a way, like God, as bearing within itself some resemblances to its Prototype, the soul is by a strict necessity attracted to the kindred Deity. . . . If then . . . the soul is unencumbered with superfluities and no trouble connected with the body presses it down, its advance towards Him Who draws it to Himself is sweet and congenial (450b).

Created human nature is constituted by the motion of love for what is still lacking in goodness and, when carried by an informed will toward participation in and communion with the divine, this forward movement of return is called hope. Whenever and wherever hope is attained, it is succeeded by memory that retains knowledge of the experience (449b). But

whenever the soul . . . having divested itself of the multifarious emotions incident to its nature, gets its Divine form and, mounting above Desire, enters within that towards which it was once incited by that Desire, it offers no harbour within itself either for hope or for memory. It holds the object of the one; the other is extruded from consciousness by the occupation in enjoying all that is good; and thus the soul copies the life that is above, and is conformed to the peculiar features of the Divine nature; none of its habits are left to it except that of love, which clings by natural affinity to the Beautiful. . . . When, then, the soul, having become simple and single in form and so perfectly godlike, finds that perfectly simple and immaterial good which is really worth enthusiasm and love, it attaches itself to it and blends with it by means of the movement and activity of love, fashioning itself according to that which it is continually finding and grasping. Becoming by this assimilation to the Good all that the nature of that which it participates is, the soul will consequently, owing to there being no lack of any good in that thing itself which it participates, be itself also in no lack of anything (450a).

Faith and hope will end, since they are supports “in the uncertainty about the things hoped for” (450b). In contrast, “love never fails” (cf. 1 Cor. 13:8), “being always as it is” (450a). As Macrina said earlier (4.2), love is the essence of ecstatic divine personhood and, therefore, it is also the goal toward which humans strive in order to become authentic persons.

Love, therefore, is the foremost of all excellent achievements . . . If ever, then, the soul reach this goal, it will be in no need of anything else; it will embrace that plenitude of things which are, whereby alone it seems in any way to preserve within itself the stamp of God’s actual blessedness (450b).

The state of pure love and freedom cannot be reached unless

that which weighs us down, I mean this encumbering load of earthiness, be shaken off the soul; . . . unless we have cleansed ourselves by a better training from the habit of affection which we have contracted in life towards this earthiness (453b).

Standing in “liberty and fearlessness” is the result of “having put off . . . all that foreign growth” of affection and having “discarded the shame” that comes with having allowed oneself to be seduced by evil (452a). True “liberty is the coming up to a state which owns no master and is self-regulating; it is that with which we were gifted by God at the beginning, but which has been obscured” by feelings of shame (452a). And once again, since freedom is a good, it is

one and the same essentially; it has a natural attraction to itself. It follows, then, that as everything that is free will be united with its like, and as virtue is a thing that has no master, that is, is free, everything that is free will be united with virtue. Therefore, those who have parted with evil will be united with Him; and so . . . God will be ‘all in all.’ For while our present life is active amongst a variety of multiform conditions, and the things we have relations with are numerous, for instance, time, air, locality, food and drink, clothing, sunlight, lamplight, and other necessities of life, none of which, many though they be, are God, – that blessed state which we hope for is in need of none of these things, but the Divine Being will become all, and instead of all, to us, distributing Himself proportionately to every need of that existence . . . [becoming] everything thinkable and nameable that goes to make our life happy. But He that becomes ‘all’ things will be ‘in all’ things too . . . but He that will be ‘in all’ will never be in that which does not exist (452b – 453a).

The coming together into a sympathetic community that includes all elements of creation is implied in any coming together of humanity with divinity. It can be no other way when one recognizes divinity in the things of creation. Competition and conflict, division and domination, all disappear in the face of the love and freedom that is God.

4.9 Resurrection (*anastasis*)

The climax of Macrina’s thesis is that every soul will be rejoined with the same body of its composite human being in an event of “resurrection” (445b). Her *tour de force* as the logical completion of Neoplatonic thought is that, based on the Incarnation, matter will also be divinized. For humans, the conjoining of body and soul is eternal.

She first acknowledges that, among philosophers, there are various approaches to the idea of a resurrection (453b-454a). For example, while some limit the migration of souls into other humans, some believe in a trans-species migration and so include irrational creatures as potential future embodiments. Yet others extend the migration so far as to include vegetative and insensate life forms. These beliefs are “not absolutely out of harmony” with her own view; their point of contact is that the soul of the departed does assume another body. However, while “it is not contrary to probability that the soul should again inhabit a body” (454a), it is “utterly incongruous” (454b) to confuse the nature of soul, making it in one “particular environment of body . . . a rational and intellectual soul,” in another an irrational sensate soul, later perhaps even insensate. To extend the migration beyond humans is tantamount to saying that “one single nature runs

through all beings” (454b). This would mean that we could not eat grapes or corn without the suspicion that we are “laying violent hands on kinsmen, or ancestors, or fellow country-men” (455a). In addition, these beliefs result in a “confusion of good and evil” (455b), leading to the

godless theory . . . that nothing amongst the things in nature is brought into existence without deriving its peculiar constitution from evil as its source. If, that is, neither men nor plants nor cattle can be born unless some soul from above has fallen into them, and if this fall is owing to some tendency to evil, then they evidently think that evil controls the creation of all beings (456a-b).

Macrina cannot give evil such credence, as it makes a mockery of the “treasures of virtue” (457a). The existence of natural reason, causing humans to “strive after a life of virtue,” proves that

vice is not prior in time to the act of beginning to live, and that our nature did not thence derive its source, but that the all-disposing wisdom of God was the Cause of it: in short, that the soul issues on the stage of life in the manner which is pleasing to its Creator, and then (but not before), by virtue of its power of willing, is free to choose that which is to its mind, and so, whatever it may wish to be, becomes that very thing (457a).

Her belief in a personal soul governing a body-soul compound requires, in the resurrection, “the same body again as before, composed of the same atoms, . . . compacted around the soul” (454a), recognizable as the existential human although the atoms of the body have been transformed in the resurrection. The idea can bring some comfort to those who know they must eventually be separated from their bodies.²⁰⁰

If there be in you any clinging to this body, and the being unlocked from this darling thing give you pain, let not this, either, make you despair. You will behold this bodily envelopment, which is now dissolved in death, woven again out of the same atoms, not indeed into this organization with its gross and heavy texture, but with its threads worked up into something more subtle and ethereal, so that you will not only have near you that which you love, but it will be restored to you with a brighter and more entrancing beauty (453b).

²⁰⁰ Cf. Lindbergh, *Under A Wing*, 191. She relates the words her father said, as reported by her brother Land, when needing sedation to help his body relax shortly before his death: “I’m not afraid, but my body is afraid.” She continues: “Land said it was really quite beautiful, and not painful at all – no struggle, even the short period of breathing trouble didn’t seem to panic or change Father. I am so proud of him for not changing, for getting away clean, and being himself the whole time. For not having to be in a hospital, for not deteriorating or ranting or raving or raging. It changes the whole idea of death for me, makes it reasonable, quiet.”

Macrina provides “a fanciful simile” (445a) to lend credence to the resurrection. Suppose an artist who mixes colours to form “a particular tint,” also has the ability to again separate them from the union, to “remember the actual nature” of each original colour used in the “mutual blending.” By analogy the soul becomes the “art of the painter,” the “natural atoms stand for the colours” used, and the mixture “compounded of the various dyes, and the return of these to their native state . . . represent respectively the concourse, and the separation of the atoms.” The “exact knowledge” required to form the identical mixture once again after its dissolution is familiar to the soul that knows “the natural peculiarities” of each atom. So

however far from each other their natural propensity and their inherent forces of repulsion urge them, and debar each from mingling with its opposite, none the less will the soul be near each by its power of recognition, and will persistently cling to the familiar atoms, until their concourse after this division again takes place in the same way, for that fresh formation of the dissolved body which will be, and be called, resurrection . . . For if the identical individual particle does not return and only something that is homogeneous but not identical is fetched, you will have something else in the place of that first thing, and such a process will cease to be a resurrection and will be merely the creation of a new man (445b-446a).

Soul, acting towards the elements of the body

like a guardian placed over private property, does not abandon them when they are mingled with their kindred atoms, and by the subtle ubiquity of her intelligence makes no mistake about them, with all their subtle minuteness, but diffuses herself along with those which belong to herself when they are being mingled with their kindred dust, and suffers no exhaustion in keeping up with the whole number of them when they stream back into the universe, but remains with them, no matter in what direction or in what fashion Nature may arrange them (446a).

“Should the signal be given by the All-disposing Power for these scattered atoms to combine again,” then in the human “who is being ‘remoulded’” by the vital powers of soul, the atoms “rush simultaneously together . . . each single one of them being wedded to its former neighbour and embracing an old acquaintance” (446a). Moreover, “what is

present in the complete mass is present also in each division of the mass” (448a), so that, by virtue of soul’s presence, each atom remembers every detail of the whole body.²⁰¹

Gregory has one last question for Macrina: “Is the state which we are to expect to be like the present state of the body” (462a)? Because if so, then the Resurrection will be “an unending calamity,” due to the “piteous” state of most humans upon their death. And if not, if instead of an exposed infant or an old man “one sees a person in his prime,” then how can there be recognition of persons? In fact,

who has not heard that human life is like a stream, moving from birth to death at a certain rate of progress, and then only ceasing from that progressive movement when it ceases also to exist? This movement indeed is not one of spacial change . . . [but one] of internal alteration . . . [so] a particular man is not the same even as he was yesterday, but is made different by this transmutation (462b-463a).

Will the Resurrection then restore to life a whole “crowd of human beings” for every single human (463a)? Furthermore, “what use will there be for the members of our body, when we are no longer to expect in that existence any of the activities for which our members now exist” (463b)? And, “if things that are not going to contribute in any way to that other life are not to surround the body, none of the parts which at present constitute the body would exist either” (464a). How then will the Resurrection “not be an absurdity”?

Macrina’s answer comes as a definitive statement of human being since, for her, the Resurrection is “the reconstitution of our nature in its original form.” But in that form of life, of which God Himself was the Creator, it is reasonable to

²⁰¹ Clair Sylvia and William Novak, *A Change of Heart: a memoir* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997), 221-233, relates her experience as a heart-lung transplant recipient who began experiencing the memories, dreams, likes and dislikes of another person after her surgery. Her search for answers led her to various renowned medical research centres in the United States, where she discovered various theories of cellular memory. Biochemistry verifies that the brain and the body communicate through short chains of amino acids called neuropeptides and receptors, distributed throughout the body. Cellular and developmental biology experts theorized that the transplanted heart comes with the donor’s unique receptors, so the recipient’s cells now respond to two different “identities.” They also confirm that separated cells communicate with each other. Neuropsychologists verify that the organ recipients who notice the new identity are “often introspective and paying attention” kind of people. Systemic Memory hypothesis uses mathematics to predict “that all transplant patients register information and energy from the donor’s tissues . . . Moreover, loving people can register, in their brain waves, the electrocardiograms of other people’s hearts.” Internal medicine specialist Larry Dossey offers this explanation: “We are gradually arriving at a picture of consciousness that I call *nonlocal mind* – what our ancestors called the Universal Mind, or the One Mind. In this view, the mind is not limited by time and space; it cannot be localized or confined to individual brains and bodies, or even to the present. At some dimension of consciousness we are all united as a single, seamless whole. But most of us prefer to retain the idea that we are solitary individual, isolated physically and mentally from everyone else.”

believe that there was neither age nor infancy nor any of the sufferings arising from our present various infirmities, nor any kind of bodily affliction whatever. It is reasonable, I say, to believe that God was the Creator of none of these things, but that man was a thing divine before his humanity got within reach of the assault of evil (464b).

Human nature became “passional [and] had to encounter all the necessary results of a life of passion” (464b). When humans again become passionless, they will not be subject to the “visible results” of passion, i.e., “sexual intercourse, conception, parturition, impurities, suckling, feeding, evacuation, gradual growth to full size, prime of life, old age, disease, and death” (465a). The life form we are familiar with is “ever in a flux,” but it has nothing to do with resurrected life, the operation of which there is only one similar condition: “that a man should have lived, by being born” (465a). God will bring “our nature back to the primal state of man” (465b).

So the resurrection will be a second creation, a return to a noble human nature and a “pristine state of grace” (467a). What sort of body will the cleansed soul receive? As the body of the ear of grain “comes to light” out of the death and dissolution of the seed planted in the ground, so

the Divine power, in the superabundance of Omnipotence, does not only restore you that body once dissolved, but makes great and splendid additions to it, whereby the human being is furnished in a manner still more magnificent (466b).

The grain of wheat, after its dissolution in the soil, leaves behind the slowness of its bulk and the peculiar quality of its shape, and yet it has not left and lost itself, but, still self-centred, grows into the ear, though in many points it has made an advance upon itself, namely in size, in splendour, in complexity, in form. In the same fashion the human being deposits in death all those peculiar surroundings which it has acquired from passionate propensities; dishonour . . . and corruption and weakness and characteristics of age; and yet the human being does not lose itself. It changes into . . . incorruption, that is, and glory and honour and power and absolute perfection; into a condition in which its life is no longer carried on in the ways peculiar to mere nature, but has passed into a spiritual and passionless existence . . . with godlike marks. For . . . incorruption and glory and honour and power are those distinct and acknowledged marks of Deity which once belonged to him who was created in God’s image, and which we hope for hereafter (466b & 467b).

Within the framework of time, the aim for human nature is to be always in the process of moving toward intelligibility, ever embracing more of the divine perfection on

which it has set its sights. But according to Macrina's teleology, at some point the whole of this nature will become 'full' (*pleroma*).

Since every intellectual reality is fixed in a plenitude of its own, it is reasonable to expect that humanity also will arrive at a goal (for in this respect also humanity is not to be parted from the intellectual world); so that we are to believe that it will not be visible for ever only in defect, as it is now . . . Whenever, then, humanity shall have reached the plenitude that belongs to it, this on-streaming movement of production will altogether cease; it will have touched its destined bourn and a new order of things quite distinct from the present procession of births and deaths will carry on the life of humanity (459b).

Presumably correspondent with the ending of time, there will be an end to the succession of souls but, based on probabilities, eschatological human life will continue as "imperishable, with no birth and no decay to change it" (459b).

When the completed Universe no longer admits of further increase, all the souls in their entire number will come back out of their invisible and scattered condition into tangibility and light, the identical atoms (belonging to each soul) reassembling together in the same order as before; and this reconstitution of human life is called . . . the Resurrection (459b-460a).

Whenever the time comes that . . . our nature is as it were to be fixed up again in the Resurrection . . . then a universal feast will be kept around the Deity by those who have decorated themselves in the Resurrection; and one and the same banquet will be spread for all, with no differences cutting off any rational creature from an equal participation in it (461a, cf. Ps 118:26-29).

Then "one festival of united voices shall occupy us all, that festival shall be the confession and the recognition of the Being Who truly Is" (461b, cf. Phil 2:10) and "all dead and prostrate things shall be 'changed in the twinkling of an eye' into immortal beings" (461b, cf. 1 Cor 15:52). We can know this because the Incarnation "shows in action the Resurrection itself, making a beginning of this work of wonder from things more within our reach and less capable of being doubted" (461b).

4.10 *Apokatastasis*

Her strong belief that all created things eventually return to their source leads Macrina to say:

when evil shall have been some day annihilated in the long revolutions of the ages, nothing shall be left outside the world of goodness, but . . . even from those

[formerly] evil spirits shall rise in harmony the confession of Christ's Lordship (444b).

The first man Adam was created in "original splendour . . . but with the arrival of evil human nature was diminished into a mere multitude" of individuals "denuded" of the beauty of the original. The remedy for the vice that grew on human souls is to collect everything "counterfeit" to growth and productive life, to pick it out of the infected souls, and to commit it to "the fire that consumes everything unnatural," so that

their humanity will thrive and will ripen into fruit-bearing . . . and some day after long courses of ages will get back again that universal form which God stamped upon us at the beginning (468a).

In all these operations, God's

end is one, and one only; it is this: when the complete whole of our race shall have been perfected from the first man to the last, – some having at once in this life been cleansed from evil, others having afterwards in the necessary periods been healed by the Fire, others having in their life here been unconscious equally of good and of evil, – to offer to every one of us participation in the blessings which are in Him, which, the Scripture tells us, 'eye hath not seen, nor ear heard,' nor thought ever reached. But this is nothing else, as I at least understand it, but to be in God Himself; for the Good which is above hearing and eye and heart must be that Good which transcends the universe (465b).

Macrina's final summary is one last affirmation of the goodness inherent in human being, the goodness of true being that ultimately exists only in God. She concludes: when all accretions to the soul

have been purged from it and utterly removed by the healing processes worked out by the Fire, then every one of the things which make up our conception of the good will come to take their place, incorruption, that is, and life, and honour, and grace, and glory, and everything else that we conjecture is to be seen in God, and in His Image, man as he was made (468b).

4.11 Macrina's Death

Having reached the end of her "reasoned reflection" (*logismos*, *VSM* 63, n. 30), Gregory tells us, she also realized the goal of human life.

I suspected that she had transcended the common nature. For not even in her last breaths to feel anything strange in the expectation of death nor to fear separation from life, but with sublime thinking to philosophise upon what she had chosen for this life, right from the beginning up to her last breath, to me this seemed no longer to be a part of human realities. Instead, it was as if an angel had

providentially assumed human form, an angel in whom there was no affinity for, nor attachment to, the life of the flesh, about whom it was not unreasonable that her thinking should remain impassible, since the flesh did not drag it down to its own passions. For this reason she seemed to me to be making manifest to those then present that pure, divine love of the unseen bridegroom, which she had nourished secretly in the most intimate depths of her soul, and she seemed to transmit the desire which was in her heart to rush to the one she longed for, so that freed from the fetters of the body, she might swiftly be with him. For it was really towards her beloved that she ran, and no other of life's pleasures ever turned her eye to itself away from her beloved. . . . The more she neared her departure, the more she contemplated the beauty of the bridegroom and longed to rush impulsively to her beloved (*VSM* 38-39)

Her final prayer is a summation of virtuous faith, hope, and love:

You have released us, O lord, from the fear of death.
 You have made the end of life here on earth a beginning of true life for us.
 You let our bodies rest in sleep in due season and you awaken them again . . .
 You entrust to the earth our bodies of earth which you fashioned with your own hands and you restore again what you have given, transforming with incorruptibility and grace what is mortal and deformed in us. . . .
 You have opened up for us a path to the resurrection . . .
 God Eternal, upon whom I have cast myself from my mother's womb,
 Whom my soul has loved with all its strength, To whom
 I have consecrated flesh and soul from my infancy up to this moment . . .
 May I be found before you in the stripping off of my body
 without stain or blemish in the beauty of my soul . . . (*VSM* 39-41).

4.12 Conclusion

At times the philosophical commentary of the Cappadocians does appear to tend toward dualism, as in Macrina's definition of soul as "immaterial and spiritual" (*DAR* 433b), acting as an animating force or "mistress of [a] particular vessel" (447a) but having no "sort of communion" (437a) with bodies. Although forcefully countered by themes such as the indissoluble unity of body and soul and the final resurrection of the body, this strong cultural influence is never completely eradicated from their thought. The soul's call to transcend earthly limitations is emphasized to such a degree that the counter pull, the soul's good desire for attachment to people and places and things, is often underdeveloped. We get a glimpse of it in the lives of the Cappadocian writers only incidentally, by observing the retreat and attraction to a specific place of quietude, or the function of highly-valued friendships, or regard for sacramental worship, and even

occasional concern for bodies. Gregory's conversations with Vetiana and the deaconess Lampadion after Macrina's death illustrate the point. He expresses a keen desire to dress her in fine garments for burial, only to be told that Macrina had been so concerned with the "adornment" of the "pure life" that one tired cloak and veil and one pair of worn sandals were the only "ornamentation of the body" that she "had anything to do with." Gregory is chided with the words, "She knew only one repository for her own wealth, the treasury of heaven. There she stored everything, and left nothing behind on earth" (*VSM* 44). Now the very next page reveals that Macrina did indeed possess a few material articles that she treasured on earth, with which she adorned her body – a ring containing a "fragment of the wood of life" and a cross, both worn on a chain around her neck. In spite of the opposition from her fellow-nuns, Gregory's wish prevails and Macrina's body is "dressed as a bride" in a robe of "fine linen" from his own store. But the deaconess again argues that it is not fitting for "this sacred beauty . . . to shine in clothing brought in just for the occasion" and, in the end, a "dark mantle" belonging to their mother is placed over all (*VSM* 47). Perhaps the incident reflects Gregory's own struggle with the value of a godly attachment to matter, which remains subverted and implicit rather than explicit. One is left with a sense of ambiguity and unresolved conflict about the material "expressions of the soul,"²⁰² as well as about natural bodily functions.

We might also ask, How is it even remotely possible for the very same atoms to come together to form the body? What happens in the instance that some atoms from the dissolution of one body end up in another body, by virtue of the chain of being? To whose body will the atom go in the resurrection? Although the question is never addressed, I expect Macrina's answer would be that we cannot know the how of God's operations, only that they are reliable. Her words would parallel Basil's response: "At all events let us prefer the simplicity of faith to the demonstrations of reason" (*Hex* 1.10.57b), for "if we raise our eyes towards the omnipotent God" (*Hex* 3.3,66b) we discover that impossible arguments become reconcilable.

The works on Macrina do, however, give several important precisions to Cappadocian anthropology. First, mind or soul is an immaterial and spiritual form

²⁰² Thomas Moore, *Soul Mates: Honoring the Mysteries of Love and Relationship* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994), 10.

equally in each and every atom that united forms the body, whose existence is known by its activities. The dissolution of death means that the atoms wander off, but soul does not abandon them. Resurrection, as verified in the Incarnation, is the reconstitution of human nature in its original form, a thing divine, when soul recalls every atom of body and each remembers every detail of the whole body. In a similar but greater way, God is love, attracting like to like, so drawing the human to the divine. Created human nature, body and soul, is constituted by this motion of love for goodness. Gregory Nyssa had defined true freedom as the ability to participate in the goodness of divine persons. Macrina makes a notable refinement to the notion, basing freedom on the communion of persons. True liberty, she says, is removal of the feeling of shame to allow the much freer movement of love for God. The weight on soul, it should be emphasized, is not body but undue attachment to bodily limitations and, as such, it is a perspectival weight. Since evil is limited, purgation will happen, either before or after death, for when every will rests in God there will be no receptacle left for evil. This rest is *apokatastasis*, the return of all to source, when God will be all in all.

The Cappadocian whose work we have not yet investigated is Gregory Nazianzen. It remains for him to address the eschatological state of human being. His unique contribution is a series of pithy sayings that both summarize the work of God in *oikonomia* and make lucid the human vocation as a metamorphosed state of being, having undergone an actual ontological change.

CHAPTER FIVE: GREGORY NAZIANZEN c. 325 – 391.²⁰³

5.1 Life & Times²⁰⁴

One of three children born, possibly later in life, to Bishop Gregory Nazianzus the elder and his wife Nonna, Gregory tells us that he was consecrated to God even before his birth in Cappadocia. He describes his father as “both noble and good,” possessing such great integrity as to provide a “standard for life.” His mother was “the equal” of his father, “female with respect to her body but with respect to her character a superman.” Having had “a conversation with God” about her longing for a son, she “anticipated the gift,” returning it to God even before receiving it. Gregory perceives his great benefit, growing up with the “best models for life in my home.”²⁰⁵

He confesses to being totally absorbed in his lessons, first at Caesarea under Carterius, then at “the flourishing Palestinian school of rhetoric,”²⁰⁶ and later during many years of studying at Athens. His childhood friend, Basil, whom Gregory calls “Wisdom’s wisest son,”²⁰⁷ joined him there and the two became close companions, “sharing all things in common” to the point of having “one soul binding a separation of two bodies.” The “like-mindedness” that “outstandingly led” them “to disclose the deep

²⁰³ Throughout the entire section on Gregory Nazianzus, I am indebted to Jaroslav Pelikan’s Gifford Lectures at Aberdeen, 1992 – 1993, as recorded in *Christianity and Classical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993). I have relied on him for insight into as well as direction to and translation of texts, some of them unavailable in the standard Schaff and Wace. In order to avoid copious footnotes, parenthetical references to primary texts will indicate the source text, followed by the page number in the translation used. Schaff and Wace will be identifiable by the inclusion of the appropriate column number immediately following the page number, e.g., *Or* 28.21,296a; Pelikan will be simply *Or* 28.21,142. The abbreviation *Or* signifies *Orationes*.

²⁰⁴ *Gregory of Nazianzus Autobiographical Poems*, trans. Carolinne White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) provides the primary text in Greek and English. Unless otherwise noted, I am using a translation done in conjunction with Professor Peter Burnell, Classics, University of Saskatchewan.

²⁰⁵ *Gregory Nazianzus*, trans. White 14, 51 – 75 & 94.

²⁰⁶ *Gregory Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzus*, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers* (Massachusetts, Hendrickson Publishers, 1995), 189.

²⁰⁷ *Gregory Nazianzus, Cyril of Jerusalem*, ed. Schaff & Wace, 190, n. 5.

affairs of the heart” was their mutual “desire for God and for the higher good.”²⁰⁸ Having outgrown any inclination to display his rhetorical skills in verbal contests, Gregory’s aim in practicing philosophy became to pursue the “greater mysteries” of relationship. He relates his struggle between what seems to have remained a constant inner desire to retire to solitary contemplation of the divine (*theoria*, which he calls “useful to oneself alone with a narrow kind of love”) and the life of active service to others (*praxis*, “more useful in a practical sense”).²⁰⁹ Determined to find a balance between the two coordinates of the relational life, a middle way that would reflect the human vocation (cf. Aristotle *Eth Nic.* 1098a & 1095b),²¹⁰ he left Athens c. 357.

Although he did spend portions of time at Basil’s monastery, in 361 he was, against his will, ordained to the priesthood by his elderly father and soon pressed into the position of coadjutor. In 370 Basil, now the much-beleaguered Bishop of Caesarea, appointed him Bishop at Sasima as an ally in the continuing Arian controversies, a position he may never have administered. Gregory’s father died in 374, allowing him to spend some years in the solitude he craved. In 379, after lengthy persuasion by numerous bishops and the Emperor Theodosius, he reluctantly accepted the appointment of Bishop at Constantinople, a city “established and strengthened with wholesome doctrines” (*Or* 42.10, 389a). Here his famous theological orations “directed toward the conversion of the whole inner man”²¹¹ gained for him the universal title “Theologian.” Gregory became Archbishop in 380 and presider at the Ecumenical Council in 381, from which responsibilities he also soon resigned due to intense political conflicts. He retired to Arianzus and spent the remaining years of his life in seclusion and austerity. In 431 the Ecumenical Council of Ephesus bestowed on him the distinction of “The Great”; he is celebrated as one of four Eastern doctors of the church. He has been called “the most important figure in the synthesis of classical rhetoric and Christianity . . . whose speeches became the preeminent model for Christian eloquence throughout the Byzantine period.”²¹² We will discover that Gregory’s powerful discourses, the *Orationes*, built on

²⁰⁸ Gregory Nazianzus, trans. White 26, 225-236.

²⁰⁹ Gregory Nazianzus, trans. White 28, 260-275, & 32, 300-312.

²¹⁰ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 306.

²¹¹ Gregory Nazianzus, *Cyril of Jerusalem*, ed. Philip & Wace, 196.

²¹² Pelikan, *Christianity*, 15, quoting George A. Kennedy, *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 215.

“principles of enquiry and speculation” (*Or* 43.11, 399a) provide vigorous pillars of support to the Cappadocian arguments that metamorphosed relational being is the goal of human life. Gregory draws their theory to its final conclusions, expressly stating the potential to become divine inherent in human being.

5.2 God as Trinity

As usual for Cappadocian philosophy, the investigation of who we are must begin with who God is. Although at times he vehemently condemned Greek myths for being demeaning to those who believed them (*Or* 39.7), on account of their “disgraceful” shortcomings (*Or* 43.8, 397b), Gregory also allowed the possibility that Greek religion provided a shadowy anticipation of the Christian Trinity (*Or* 31.16, 29) and, what is more, that “the Greek spirit reached its highest religious development . . . in philosophy, assisted by the Greek gift for constructing systematic theories of the universe.”²¹³ He called thinkers like Plotinus “natural theologians” (*Or* 4.117, 24), and systematized their classical theories of deity in *Oratio* 29 (2, 90-91, cf. Aristotle’s *Politics* III): “the three most ancient opinions concerning God” can be identified as “*anarchia*, *polyarchia*, and *monarchia*.” Anarchy, as void of any *arche*, is a “thing without order”; polyarchy, with numerous *archai*, is “factious” and therefore also “anarchial, and thus disorderly”; both lead to “dissolution.” A divine *monarchia* is the only chance for order in the cosmos. And since “it was axiomatic that order was preferable,” it was “the task of speculative thought” to make that order “intelligible” (cf. *Or* 2.4).²¹⁴

Sometimes his emphasis on “the intelligible and noncorporeal realities” of this monarchia (*Or* 31.23, 108), “beyond the sphere of time” (*Or* 29.3, 302a), led Gregory to say that “when the verb ‘to be’ was predicated of any reality other than God . . . it was being employed improperly” (cf. *Or* 30.18),²¹⁵ since fullness of being was the unique ascription of God (cf. *Or* 31.23).²¹⁶ It is in consideration of God as full being, then, that he posits a single *arche* not “constricted and envious and powerless” (*Or* 25.16, 86) but

²¹³ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 24, quoting Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, 3 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1939-44), 2:43.

²¹⁴ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 91.

²¹⁵ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 108.

²¹⁶ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 213.

“eternally sharing and being shared.”²¹⁷ Using the principle of a “prime unmoved mover” (*Or* 28.8, cf. Aristotle *Physics* 241b)²¹⁸ whose primary characteristic is voluntary and participatory self-giving, he defended a Trinitarian monotheism. But like Basil, he disagrees with Plotinus’ idea of the One as a fountain overflowing since, from his perspective, that deity would be lacking in intention and power.

Therefore, unity having from all eternity arrived by motion [within itself] at duality, found its rest in trinity. This is what we mean by Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The Father is the Begetter and the Emitter; without passion, of course, and without reference to time, and not in a corporeal manner. . . . For we shall not venture to speak of ‘an overflow of goodness,’ as one of the Greek Philosophers dared to say . . . [and] let us not ever look on this Generation as involuntary, like some natural overflow, hard to be retained, and by no means befitting our conception of Deity (*Or* 29.2, 301b).²¹⁹

Though he cautions that one might well “be frenzy-stricken for prying into the mystery of God,” by which he specifically means the eternal nature of the “Generation of the Son and the Procession of the Spirit” (*Or* 31.8, 320a-b), the *modi operandi* within the Godhead will not be disclosed to any but the divine.²²⁰ The Trinity is singularly “One God, One in diversity, diverse in Unity, wherein is a marvel” (*Or* 28, 288b).

“To be one on the basis of the laudable and holy Trinity” (*Or* 6.13, 246) refers “no less to a oneness of harmony than to a oneness of *ousia*.”²²¹

We use in an orthodox sense the terms ‘one *ousia*’ and ‘three *hypostases*,’ the one to denote the nature of the Godhead, the other the properties of the three. The Italians mean the same; but, owing to the scantiness of their vocabulary and its poverty of terms, they are unable to distinguish between *ousia* and *hypostasis*, and therefore introduce the term ‘persons [*prosopa*],’ to avoid being understood as asserting three *ousiai* (*Or* 21.35, 243).

What is the unique property, common to the three, to which *hypostasis* refers? Gregory’s third Theological Oration delineates it as relationship (*schesis*). Facing Arian alternatives

²¹⁷ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 86.

²¹⁸ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 67.

²¹⁹ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 247.

²²⁰ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 233.

²²¹ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 246.

of admitting the name Father as that of a divine essence (which would edge out the Son) or that of an action (which would acknowledge the Son as created), he states:²²²

Father is not a name either of an essence or of an action, most clever sirs. But it is the name of the Relation in which the Father stands to the Son, and the Son to the Father. For as with us these names make known a genuine and intimate relation, so, in the case before us too, they denote an identity of nature between Him that is begotten and Him that begets (*Or* 29.16, 307a).

There is present here the same argument already noted in Basil, that intelligible reality insists on the nature of the divine trinity as relationship. Furthermore, as in Basil, it also establishes the ontology of *hypostasis* as relational being.

Gregory describes the relationship in terms of what can be known about the *hypostases*. First, Father is “the creative and sustaining cause of all” (*Or* 28.6, 25). Second, the pre-existent Son is identified as the “Logos” (*Or* 37.4, 44), the Creator-Word (*Or* 30.2, 310a), or “the true Sophia” (*Or* 30.2, 218), “the personified Wisdom of God.”²²³ The third hypostasis is “the Creator-Spirit” (*Or* 31.29, 327b), the “Comforter . . . spirit of truth” sent by the Father (*Or* 31.26, 326b, cf. John 14:16-17), the “giver of holiness,”²²⁴ “from whom comes our New Birth . . . our new creation” (*Or* 31.28, 327a).

5.3 Paradigmatic Categories

Gregory affirms several distinctions already noted in earlier chapters. The categories Creator-creature overcome polytheism by locating the Son and the Holy Spirit within the unity of the Creator, potent with all the attributes of divine nature. Thus the Cappadocian model for “trinitarian monotheism . . . redefined the very meaning both of deity and of oneness, and thus it implied an infinite maximizing of Godhead.”²²⁵ It also led to belief in a chain of created being: intellectual – intellectual & sensible – sensible & animate – sensible & inanimate.

Akin to deity are those natures that are intellectual and only to be comprehended by mind; but all those of which the senses can take cognizance are utterly alien to

²²² Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 107, accurately identifies this concept in the text as quoted, but says, “To Gregory we owe one particular idea that seems to be quite new.” A more accurate approach would identify the emphasis as historically unique to Cappadocian thought, not limited to Gregory, but perhaps nowhere else stated quite so plainly.

²²³ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 218. Cf. *Or* 6.5.

²²⁴ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 65.

²²⁵ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 247.

deity, and of these the furthest removed are all those that are entirely destitute of soul and of power of motion (*Or* 38.10, 261).

However void of soul Gregory finds inanimate creation to be, still it points to the “all-sovereign Maker of all things” (*Or* 16.16, 255), for God “fill[s] the universe, yet without being identified with it.”²²⁶

The contrast between *theologia* and *oikonomia* sets the boundaries for human knowledge of God. In his fifth Theological Oration, Gregory uses the distinction to support the argument for a trinitarian God with “a highly original theory of doctrinal development.”²²⁷ He says that by “gradual additions . . . the Light of the Trinity” came to be known to humankind, who would have been overwhelmed if the revelation had been disclosed all at once (*Or* 31.26, 326a-b).

Perfection is reached by additions. For the matter stands thus. The Old Testament proclaimed the Father openly, and the Son more obscurely. The New manifested the Son, and suggested the Deity of the Spirit. Now the Spirit Himself dwells among us, and supplies us with a clearer demonstration of Himself (*Or* 31.26, 326a).

So a mature *theologia* will accept a Trinitarian God, based on *oikonomia*. It will also accept that every analogy for the Trinity is inadequate; since “the Divine Nature cannot be apprehended by human reason” (*Or* 28.11, 292b), “whatever we have imagined or figured to ourselves or whatever reason has delineated is not the reality of God” (*Or* 28.6, 69, cf. 31.31-32, 72). We note that Gregory Nazianzen incorporates the same element of skepticism that we found earlier in Basil and Gregory Nyssa, as he admonishes us that “we cannot even represent to ourselves all its greatness” (*Or* 28.11, 292b), that is, that any names given to God “point beyond themselves to the mystery of the incomprehensible nature.”²²⁸ Yet in light of the project of speculative philosophy to determine the true end of humanity, “to give you some assistance for your argument” (*Or* 31.10, 321a), Gregory examines various titles for God. His aim is to ascertain what they contribute to knowledge of the “multifarious operations”²²⁹ of God in the world (cf. *Or* 31.29, 327a-b) that will help to determine the human vocation.

²²⁶ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 255.

²²⁷ J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines* (USA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978), 261.

²²⁸ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 210.

²²⁹ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 210.

Oratio 30 illustrates how such dialectics shapes Gregory's thought.

We will begin thus. The Deity cannot be expressed in words. And this is proved to us, not only by argument, but by the wisest and most ancient of the Hebrews, . . . [who] appropriated certain characters to the honour of the Deity . . . For neither has any one yet breathed the whole air, nor has any mind entirely comprehended, or speech exhaustively contained the Being of God. But we sketch Him by His Attributes, and so obtain a certain faint and feeble and partial idea concerning Him, and our best Theologian is he who has, not indeed discovered the whole, for our present chain does not allow of our seeing the whole, but conceived of Him to a greater extent than another, and gathered in himself more of the Likeness or adumbration of the Truth, or whatever we may call it (*Or* 30.17, 315b-316a).

Gregory next identifies “‘the one who is [*ho on*],’ and ‘God [*ho theos*],’ as the two technical terms distinctive to theology, with the first, ‘*ho on*,’ being technically ‘superior’ as a precise ontological title.”²³⁰

As far then as we can reach, He Who Is, and God, are the special names of His Essence; and of these especially He Who Is . . . for the Name God . . . would still be one of the Relative Names, and not an Absolute one (*Or* 31.18, 316a).

He contrasts these theological names with those relating to God's authority, such as King of Glory or Lord of Hosts, and those relating to God's government, such as God of Peace, but, he says, the “Proper” names for the persons are Father, Son, and Holy Ghost (*Or* 31.19, 316a-b).

Gregory then places names used for the Son in two groups, as he says, one for names of the Son apart from the Incarnation, the other “peculiarly our own,” as belonging to *oikonomia* and “to that nature which He assumed.” The section ends with his first clear delineation of the purpose of God's actions and the vocation for humans.

In my opinion He is called Son because He is identical with the Father in Essence; and not only for this reason, but also because He is Of Him. . . . And He is called the Word, because He is related to the Father as Word to Mind . . . Perhaps this relation might be compared to that between the Definition and the Thing defined since this also is called Logos. For, it says, he that has mental perception of the Son . . . has also perceived the Father . . . For everything that is begotten is a silent word of him that begat it. And if any one should say that this Name was given Him because He exists in all things that are, he would not be wrong . . . He is also called Wisdom, as the Knowledge of things divine and human . . . And Power, as the Sustainer of all created things . . . And Truth, as being in nature One and not

²³⁰ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 265.

many, and as the pure Seal of the Father and His most unerring Impress . . . Moreover He is called Light as being the Brightness of souls cleansed by word and life . . . And He is called Life, because He is Light, and is the constituting and creating Power of every reasonable soul . . . He is Sanctification, as being Purity . . . And Redemption, because He sets us free . . . And Resurrection, because He raises up from hence, and brings to life again . . . (*Or* 30.20, 316b-317a).

So He is called Man, not only that through His Body He may be apprehended by embodied creatures, whereas otherwise this would be impossible because of His incomprehensible nature; but also that by Himself He may sanctify humanity, and be as it were a leaven to the whole lump . . . becoming for all men all things that we are, except sin; – body, soul, mind and all through which death reaches – and thus He became Man, who is the combination of all these . . . He is The Way, because He leads us through Himself; The Door, as letting us in; the Shepherd, as making us dwell in a place of green pastures . . . These are the titles of the Son. Walk through them . . . that you may become a god, ascending from below, for His sake Who came down from on high for ours (*Or* 30.21, 317b-318a).

Gregory is famous for his succinct formulations regarding the economy of salvation in Incarnation, in axioms such as: “He remained what he was; what he was not, he assumed” (*Or* 29.19, 277), and “What has not been assumed [in incarnation] has not been healed [in salvation]” (*Ep* 101).²³¹ The Son indeed seems to heal human nature “simply in virtue of touching it.”²³² Moreover, he “continues to wear the Body which He assumed, until He make me God by the power of His incarnation” (*Or* 30.14, 315a). The formulations assume an ontological connection between divine and human being and act as precise definitions of the intended end of human life.

The third set of categories Gregory endorses, which is really a methodology already encountered above, is that of apophatic – cataphatic language. The first requirement in thinking about God is to move outside the categories of “time and creatureliness” (*Or* 25.17, 115). But analogy can still be useful, as in: “What time, measured by the course of the sun, is to us, that eternity is to the everlasting one, namely, a sort of timelike movement and interval coextensive with their existence” (*Or* 45.4, 115). Without these referents “it is difficult to conceive God but to define Him in words

²³¹ Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 112. Cf. Pelikan, *Christianity*, 272-3, who notes that a mature Gregory rejects two other possible theories of atonement. In *Or* 30.14 Gregory insists that “legal satisfaction” is not acceptable and in *Or* 45.22 he rejects Christ’s death as a ransom offered to the devil: “The Father accepts him, but neither asked for him nor demanded him; but it was on account of the incarnation, and because humanity must be sanctified by the humanity of God, that he might deliver us himself, and overcome the tyrant.”

is an impossibility, as one of the Greek teachers of Divinity taught, not unskilfully, as it appears to me” (*Or* 28.4, 289b, cf. Plato *Timaeus*). “Having no other words to use, we use what we have” (*Or* 37.4, 339a), yet for the sake of approaching truth as nearly as is possible, when speaking of the “wholly incomprehensible” and transcendent simplicity of God’s inner being, language of necessity becomes apophatic (*Or* 38.7, 347a). Not that these negations, even when all combined, begin to approximate the divine nature which is “beyond” human reason, but they are the maximum point “to” which reason can attain (*Or* 28.9).²³³ Yet extreme caution must be exercised at all times, for even in employing the “fundamental metaphysical principle: ‘The divine is characterized by *apatheia*’” (*Or* 25.17), the required negation was overdetermination, for “neither ‘conflict [*lysis*],’ nor ‘stability [*stasis*],’” (*Or* 6.12) . . . could be predicated of the divine nature.”²³⁴

The only entirely appropriate avenue for human thought is an open and receptive stance of contemplation, which allows the transcendent God to become attainable through apprehension and allows the human to reach the goal of resting in God’s being. By an unusual inversion of analogy, i.e., from the invisible to the visible, accompanied by the required apophatic qualifiers, Gregory shows how the human mind can perceive God’s light as like that of the sun.²³⁵

God is Light: the highest, the unapproachable, the ineffable, that can neither be conceived in the mind nor uttered with the lips, that gives life to every reasoning creature. He is in the world of thought, what the sun is in the world of sense; presenting Himself to our minds in proportion as we are cleansed; and loved in proportion as He is presented to our mind; and again, conceived in proportion as we love Him; Himself contemplating and comprehending Himself, and pouring Himself out upon what is external to Him (*Or* 50.5, 361a).

Furthermore, the light of the sun

which bestows on the things that see and that are seen both the power of seeing and the power of being seen, is itself the most beautiful of visible things. So it is also with the God who created both the power of thinking and the power of being thought of. For those who think and for that which is thought of, God is the highest of the objects of thought, in whom every desire finds its goal and beyond whom it cannot go any further. For not even the most philosophical, the most piercing, or the most curious intellect has a more exalted object than this, nor can

²³² Meredith, *Cappadocians*, 112.

²³³ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 201 & 208.

²³⁴ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 86.

²³⁵ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 104.

it ever have one. This, then, is the utmost of things desirable, and those who arrive at it find a total rest from speculation (*Or* 21.1, 201).

5.4 Human Nature

Gregory describes his own birth as a coming into physical being, a combination of clay or earth mingled with soul, whose presence is earnest (*arrhabon*) or token of the greater excellence to come. Note again the implicit dualism in equating “I” with the soul, whose implied task is to rule the whole.

And so in this way I became present in this life, a composite with mud – alas! – which we either rule or scarcely control. Except, I take the birth itself as a pledge of all goodness, for to be ungrateful is not orderly and proper.²³⁶

Oratio 38 further describes Creator-Word’s purpose in creating humanity – to form a visible display of “the whole riches of Goodness.” God made this “mixture of opposites” into “a single living being,” by incorporating both “the visible and the invisible” into one entity (38.11, 348a). The passage provides a fresh perspective on Macrina’s concept of humans as microcosm, emphasizing human nature not so much as the epitome of the visible world but more as a deposit of the fullness that exists in the intelligible world. Note the very last phrase in this text, which introduces the notion of creation - recreation.

Taking a body from already existing matter, and placing in it a Breath taken from Himself which the Word knew to be an intelligent soul and the Image of God, as a sort of second world. He placed him, great in littleness on the earth; a new Angel, a mingled worshipper, fully initiated into the visible creation, but only partially into the intellectual; . . . temporal and yet immortal; visible and yet intellectual; in one person combining spirit and flesh; spirit, because of the favour bestowed on him, flesh . . . that he might suffer, and by suffering be put in remembrance, and corrected if he became proud of his greatness. A living creature trained here and then moved elsewhere; and, to complete the mystery, deified by its inclination to God. For to this, I think, tends that Light of Truth which we possess but in measure, that we should both see and experience the Splendour of God, which is worthy of Him Who made us, and will remake us again after a loftier fashion (*Or* 38.11, 348a-b).

As Gregory Nyssa already made perfectly clear, humans were honoured with “the principles of all goodness” (*arete*, *Or* 14.25, 130) which included an existence “from the

²³⁶ Gregory Nazianzus, trans. White, 16, 82-87.

beginning free and self-determining” (*Or* 14.25, 290). Natural “aptitude for good” was thus to be “co-ordinated with ‘free will’ in order to ‘bring the natural aptitude to effect’” (*Or* 37.20).²³⁷ God placed the human in paradise with the

gift of free will (in order that God might belong to him as the result of his choice, . . .) to till the immortal plants, . . . the Divine Conceptions, both the simpler and the more perfect . . . (*Or* 38.12, 348b).

Reason in conjunction with free will is once again presented as the faculty distinguishing humans from the rest of visible creation: “Order assembled human nature, a rational animal, out of a rational and an irrational element” (*Or* 32.9, 128).

Thus it was the image of God in humanity that provided grounding for the moral imperative (*Or* 14.2, 123), allowing Gregory to chastise those abusing positions of political power. His admonition, “You are the image of God – and you rule over those who are the image of God!” (*Or* 17.9, 123), was a call to recognize the principal of “natural equality,”²³⁸ which applied to the poor (*Or* 14 & 2.95 & 40.25) as well as to women.

I see that the majority of men are ill-disposed, and that their laws are unequal and irregular. What was the reason that they restrained the woman and indulged the man? . . . I do not accept this legislation; I do not approve this custom” (*Or* 37.6, 339b).

5.5 The Conflict

There exists for Gregory a clear hierarchy within each individual package of human nature, which enables him to declare that “everyone with a spark of sense” admits “the flesh as less precious than the soul” (*Ep.* 101, 198). The death of the body, then, is not as much a “departure” as it is “a fulfilment, a loosing of bonds, or a relief from a great burden” (*Or* 24.17, 290), allowing the immortal soul to move beyond bodily limitations. During a historical lifetime, however, the “freedom and self-determination [accorded human nature] could be threatened by the conflict . . . between ‘pleasure’ and the ‘gift of reason’” (*Or* 45.18).²³⁹ When he lauds Clement of Alexandria as one who “really combined in himself alone the whole of all the attributes that have been parcelled out by the sons of Greece among their various deities,” (*Or* 21.36, 78) the reference is to

²³⁷ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 139.

²³⁸ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 148.

his highly developed goodness or excellence in virtue, developed as soul ruled in the compound. And when he extols Basil as one “specially devoted to the adage, ‘In all things the mean is best’” (*Or* 43.60, 142, cf. Aristotle’s *Eth. Nic.*), the connection is made between the elimination of vice and the life of moderation.

Recognizing that people have “different patterns of life” which require different paths on which to advance toward goodness, “according to the proportion of faith” (*Or* 27.8, 57-8), Gregory provides a gradation of the motivations of those choosing to live the moral life: fear (of punishment), hope (for salvation), and discipline (in the practice of *aretai*) (*Or* 30.19, 144). Freely choosing the goodness of divine life, as an act of the will, best exemplifies the potential in human being.

5.6 Faith as the Fulfilment of Reason

The belief that all things in the cosmos are “directed by reason and order under the guidance of the reins of Providence,” in “a harmony known only to Him Who gave it motion” (*Or* 16.5, 248b), provides the foundation for another of Gregory’s famous axioms: “Faith is what gives fullness to our reasoning” (*Or* 29.21, 27). As useful as speculative reason is, it does have its limitations.

For when we leave off believing, and protect ourselves by mere strength of argument . . . then our argument is not strong enough for the importance of the subject (and this must necessarily be the case, since it is put in motion by an organ of so little power as is our mind) (*Or* 29.21, 309b).

To those who have not yet “learned the feebleness of reason, . . . have [not] acquired enough knowledge of reason to recognize things that surpass reason,” Gregory directs strong words: “You philosopher, you thunder from the ground! You lack even the shine a few sparks of truth might give you” (*Or* 28.28, 216-7). As Plotinus first made clear, when reason approaches the level of mystery, it is obliged to “give way in the face of the vastness of realities” (*Or* 29.21, 217).

“Faith, then, was not simply one in a series of the several ways of knowing, but it was the most radically apophatic of such ways,”²⁴⁰ which accepted the frailty of “the

²³⁹ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 290.

²⁴⁰ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 220.

organ of human understanding” (*Or* 29.21, 217) as the prerequisite for vision of, conversation with and, ultimately, union with divine being.

In Himself He sums up and contains all Being, having neither beginning in the past nor end in the future; like some great Sea of Being, limitless and unbounded, transcending all conception of time and nature, only adumbrated by the mind, and that very dimly and scantily . . . not by His Essentials, but by His Environment; one image being got from one source and another from another, and combined into some sort of presentation of the truth, which escapes us before we have caught it, and takes to flight before we have conceived it, blazing forth upon our Master-part, even when that is cleansed, as the lightning flash which will not stay its course, does upon our sight . . . in order as I conceive by that part of it which we can comprehend to draw us to itself (for that which is altogether incomprehensible is outside the bounds of hope, and not within the compass of endeavour), and by that part of It which we cannot comprehend to move our wonder, and as an object of wonder to become more an object of desire, and being desired to purify, and by purifying to make us like God; so that when we have thus become like Himself, God may, to use a bold expression, hold converse with us as Gods, being united to us . . . (*Or* 38.7, 346b-347a).

The best enlightened reason can do is to provide a toehold for knowing the transcendent divine, even if the resulting intellectual activities seem like “puzzling reflections in a mirror” (*Or* 20.12, 315). Faith, on the other hand, allows for a relationship between divine and human persons, a gradual and partial learning to know through conversation, “in an eternal quest” with no satiety, even while infinitely more of “Eternal Being” (*Or* 38.7, 346b) remains “forever unfathomable . . . knowable only in its unknowability.”²⁴¹

5.7 The Transformation of Human Nature

It was on the Mount of Transfiguration that the incarnate Son of God “became more luminous than the sun” (*Or* 29.19, 308b) in order to act “as our mystagogical guide to the future” (*Or* 29.19, 278), i.e., to clearly show the goal of human nature. And here we encounter another major dialectic that informs Cappadocian thought, that of creation – recreation.

I had a share in the image, but I did not keep it. [Christ] shares in my flesh that he may both save the image and make the flesh immortal. He communicates a second fellowship [with God] far more marvelous than the first had been. For then he imparted the better nature [to humanity], whereas this time he himself participates in the worse nature [of humanity]. This is more Godlike than the

²⁴¹ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 165.

former action, this is more sublime in the eyes of all who understand (*Or* 38.13, 285).

The process Basil had spoken of as “restoring the ancient form of the royal image” (*DSS* 9.23, 285), Gregory calls “a second fellowship” vastly surpassing the royal dignity of that first created state. “It does seem that in presenting this eschatology of *theosis*, the Cappadocians were thinking of a fundamental ontological change”²⁴² made possible by the Incarnation and effected in baptism, which “scraped off the evil matter” of dis-ease with human being (*Or* 40.34, 372b) to allow one to “receive again the image whole” (*Or* 40.34, 281). “Man and God . . . became a single whole . . . in order to make me God to the same extent that he was made man” (*Or* 29.19, 318).²⁴³ Gregory explains:

What God is in nature and essence, no one has ever yet discovered or can discover. Whether it will ever be discovered is a question that someone who wishes to do so may examine and decide. In my opinion it will be discovered when that within us which is Godlike and divine, I mean our mind and *logos*, will have mingled with its like [the divine *Logos*], and the image will have ascended to the archetype, of which it now has the desire. And this, I think, is the solution of that vexed problem as to the meaning of the words: ‘Our knowledge then will be whole, like God’s knowledge of us.’ But in our present life all that comes to us is but a little effluence, and as it were a small effulgence from a great light (*Or* 28.17, 315 cf. 1 Corinthians 13:12 & Wisdom 7:26).

That this metamorphosed state is a “here already and not yet here”²⁴⁴ paradox is made clear by other of Gregory’s statements. His Second Theological Oration offers his own experience of going “up eagerly into the Mount . . . to enter within the Cloud, and hold converse with God, for so God commands” (*Or* 28.2, 289a). Elsewhere he dares to say, “I too am an Image of God, of the Heavenly Glory, though I be placed on earth” (*Or* 34.12, 337a). The tension becomes clearest in the funeral oration for his sister, Gorgonia, in which her life of “cleansing and perfecting” is spoken of as a “foretaste” of “the vision of glory . . . of the Trinity Most High” (*Or* 8.23, 244b). His address, “O nature of woman, overcoming that of man in the common struggle for salvation, and demonstrating

²⁴² Pelikan, *Christianity*, 318.

²⁴³ Meredith, *Cappadocians* 48, cites Donald F. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 179: “We would point out that no Christian theologian prior to Gregory employed the term *theosis* (or the idea contained in the term) with as much consistency and frequency as did he.”

²⁴⁴ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 321.

that the distinction between male and female is one of body, not of soul!” (*Or* 8.14, 308), provides solid evidence of his conviction that historical gender is no barrier to expressing image of God, to participation in the mind of God, or to becoming like God. Gorgonia’s “great boldness toward Him who called her” was her desire

to fling away these fetters, and escape from the mire in which we spend our lives, and to associate in purity with Him Who is Fair, and entirely to hold her Beloved, Who is I will even say it, her Lover, by Whose rays, feeble though they now are, we are enlightened, and Whom, though separated from Him, we are able to know. Nor did she fail even of this desire, divine and sublime though it was, and, what is still greater, she had a foretaste of His Beauty . . . [and] full of the days of God . . . she was set free, or it is better to say, taken to God, or flew away, or changed her abode, or anticipated by a little the departure of her body. (*Or* 8.19-21, 243b-244a).

His “cautious, undogmatic”²⁴⁵ hope was for the eschatological unity of the human race in eternity (*apokatastasis*), “when we are no longer what we are now, a multiplicity of impulses and emotions, with little or nothing of God in us, but are fully like God, with room for God and God alone” (*Or* 30.6, 326).

My friend, every one that is of high mind has one Country, the Heavenly Jerusalem, in which we store up our Citizenship. All have one family – if you look at what is here below the dust – or if you look higher, that Inbreathing of which we are partakers, and which we were bidden to keep, and with which I must stand before my Judge to give an account of my heavenly nobility, and of the Divine Image. Everyone then is noble who has guarded this through virtue and consent to his Archetype (*Or* 33.12, 332a).

5.8 Conclusion

Gregory confirms the attributes given to human nature and image of God as rationality, free will, and immortality, which fact is knowable by experience of the divine. The names of the persons of the Trinity are the names of intimate relationship; the various titles refer to their multifarious operations in the salvation of the world. But God’s precise theological designation, as fullness of ontological being, is *ho on*, the one who is. The implications for Christological personhood are remarkably concrete. The Son heals human nature simply by touching it, healing what he himself assumed in Incarnation. Humans were honoured with the principles of all goodness in original

creation and were recreated in the Incarnation. The fundamental ontological change that occurs when humans choose to live out their recreation is called deification. In this process humans become God by association, a change which reaches fullness in eschatological being. This is the ultimate goal and activity of human life. Faith in God is the transfiguring fulfilment of reason, which allows for a living relationship of authentic human being and which has, in this perspective, more potency than discrete intellectual knowledge.

Our examination of Gregory Nazianzus' work adds some very important details to our understanding of authentic human being. If in God there are no boundaries, then to live in God as fully as possible is to live a multidimensional existence even as a finite being. In this relational existence the boundaries between self and self, and even between self and the divine, disappear or at least cease to function as the time and space bound demarcation lines they once appeared to be when viewed from an atomistic, fragmented and elemental view of determinate physical reality.

²⁴⁵ Pelikan, *Christianity*, 325, quotes Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 84.

CONCLUSION

In this thesis, each of the persons introduced used ideas prevalent in their culture to add a piece to the puzzle of the human vocation. Plotinus laid the foundation with the idea that relationship with the other is what brings vitality and creativity to life, thus allowing for authentic dialogic human being. Basil first establishes what can be known about God, as a basis for understanding the goal of human being. God is compassionate and chooses multi-dimensional involvement with humans; humans are constituted with mind whose primary function it is to know God. Development of godliness requires training, which begins with self-knowledge, internalizes self-discipline, and allows an ongoing conversation of faith and love to shape existential life, which transcends the boundaries of self-identity. Gregory of Nyssa establishes the integral unity of body and mind in human being. Humans are intended to be self-governing, dignified and empowered, as living image of God with divine mind implanted in and operating through the sense faculties of the body. Perpetual progress (*epekstasis*) into the goodness of God starts with self-determination and self-organization, as a self subject to the morality and freedom of divine persons who transcend individuality, and moves into communion and friendship with God. Macrina develops the theory of resurrection (*anastasis*) and return of all to source (*apokatastasis*). Soul, as an immaterial and spiritual form, is equally in each atom of the body and stays with them even in death. Resurrection is the reconstitution of the historical unity of body and soul. In a similar manner, the essence of God is love, drawing all things to the divine. True freedom is the unimpeded movement of love, which will continue to draw all to find rest in their source. Gregory Nazianzus identifies deification, i.e., humans becoming God by association, as the ultimate goal and activity of authentic human life, a state that reaches fullness only in eschatological being.

This patristic tradition has established some major conclusions about the concept of person. Fundamental to the tradition's notion of person is the belief that God is a tri-

unity whose mode of being is essentially ecstatic, loving, and relational. These aspects of divinity come to define what it means to be a person. Person is therefore not species-specific; indeed, humans are only to be regarded as persons as they claim their unique role in creation as the image of God and freely and consciously choose to move beyond the boundaries of a historical self. It is only as one participates in the divine mode of being that a human becomes “a unique, distinctive and unrepeatable” hypostasis with “life and freedom beyond space and time.”²⁴⁶ Consider the following propositions that relate to modern problems, drawn from the thesis of the Cappadocians.

Material identity is what forms the boundaries around a particular historical self. It is partly a social construct and partly a biological and psychological entity. It includes distinctions that make one unique and separate from other historical beings, such as gender and sexual orientation; race and ethnicity; social status; biological inheritance and personality; historical actions and reactions; memory, as well as cognitive, intuitive and physical abilities; and established relationships.

In addition to this particular being within time and space, all human beings share a common nature with all other human beings, and indeed all other beings to a certain extent. We could designate this universal identity.

Ontological being is not necessarily opposed to the socially constructed, biological, psychological or common states of identity. It is rather about taking the nature of both particular and universal identities and, without erasing that nature, ground it in the infinite divine being which, outside of time and space, is the root and source of time and space and all within them, is both the margins and the center in its immense infinity. Exactly which qualifiers in human being are and will be erased as non-essential to ontological being is beyond human knowledge. According to this work, lasting identity would be impacted by historical choices, by the development of intuitive abilities, by memory and some aspects of personality, possibly by genetic inheritances, but most especially by established relationships.

So one arrives at a paradox: since identity holds a greater extension than isolated individuation, there is no real particularity without universality; no real universality

²⁴⁶ Christos Yannaras, *The Freedom of Morality* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 14.

without particularity. There is for humans no real being without eternal becoming. There is no eschatological being without incarnation, even for the divine. In other words, the Incarnation is not just some after thought of a divine being limited intellectually, who is compelled to rethink the whole business of creativity after the fall. Human incarnationality is already pervaded by divine intentionality in all its creative fruitfulness. We can see this relational notion of selfhood already implicit in Plotinus. But it achieves its fullest expressions only in the Christian incarnational and divinizing anthropology of the Cappadocians.

Thus, in a very important way, this grounding of being in a divine-human and cosmic relational being allows the following distinctives to be true of persons. Person is mysterious and unfathomable, since it is immortal, incomprehensible, unbounded being.²⁴⁷ Human persons are actualized, first, by knowing themselves as those who have received an implantation of divine being and, then, by acting in synergy with it. We are constituted as agents with freedom and responsibility; we are essentially creative, dynamic beings responsible for the creation or co-creation of ourselves as unique and unrepeatable entities. The community of being involves porous personal boundaries that can be permeated in life-giving ways by love and empathy or in life-destroying ways by negation. We can expect to experience synchronicity in thought and life events; although our minds are distinctive and particular, one mind is nevertheless implanted in all in the precise sense that the community of divine mind already includes everything.

This topic has been of personal interest for many reasons. The inscription on the oracle at Delphi, ‘Know Yourself,’ admonished me to a vocation that began a life quest. The study of classical philosophy invigorated the process, by providing inspirations such as Heracleitus’ of Ephesus fragment 101, “I searched into myself”²⁴⁸ as that first subject of inquiry, the place where wisdom begins. According to the Enneagram personality types,²⁴⁹ I value truth, order and balance, strive for excellence and integrity, and have a

²⁴⁷ Dillard, *Pilgrim*, 9. “Our life is a faint tracing on the surface of mystery. . . . We must somehow take a wider view, look at the whole landscape, really see it, and describe what’s going on here. Then we can at least wail the right question into the swaddling band of darkness, or, if it comes to that, choir the proper praise.” And on 19, “We rock, cradled in the swaddling band of darkness.”

²⁴⁸ Kathleen Freeman, trans., *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 31.

²⁴⁹ Don Richard Riso and Russ Hudson, *The Wisdom of the Enneagram* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999) 97.

notion of self-discipline based on moderation in all things. Thus I often feel like an anachronism that has come home when I read classical Greek works.

This thesis also provides material for two projects dear to my heart. First, it demonstrates how culture and religion are unavoidably intertwined in thought and language, and supplies a model for present discussions on this relationship. Indeed, it demonstrates how religion must willingly embrace culture to avoid becoming lifeless and irrelevant. I find that these major historical figures support contemporary positions of gender equality by their firm conviction of genderless divine and eschatological human persons. The way the Cappadocians turn the hierarchy of God on its side, so that it is horizontal rather than vertical, strongly appeals to my cultural sensibilities, since I perceive a great need to reconceptualize authority structures on many levels.

It also allows for a living connection between the ancient roots of philosophy and the needs of the contemporary global village, which can be summarized as relationship without domination. It encourages both a capacity to embrace diversity in unity rather than to hold differences in opposition and a *modus operandi* that values and protects all of the environment we live in as part of ourselves. It answers modern questions about the nature of personhood by saying that the notion of person does not equate with the individual in isolation, nor is personhood about rights and obligations, nor is it about cognition or ability. It is, rather, about grounded relational beings for whom power is not the issue, who reach out to others in the community of being, supporting the growth of others and offering them opportunity to develop their own unique goodness.

Let me refer back to the texts for a final look at the way the Cappadocians present the human vocation as relational person. In *Song of Songs*, Gregory of Nyssa's rich allegorical commentary on the scriptural text of the same name, the soul is likened to a bride and "God is called a bridegroom whom the soul loves with her whole heart, soul, and strength" (J.180,130). In this "way of love" (J.15,43), the human soul is initiated in marriage within "the divine sanctuary" (J.22,47). "We understand the perfumes as virtues – wisdom, justice, temperance, fortitude, and so forth. If we anoint ourselves with these aromas, each of us, according to our own capacity and choice, has a good odor" (J.135,52). The bridegroom's kiss is "the fountain of spiritual life, . . . so the thirsting soul wishes to bring its mouth to the mouth that springs up with life and says: 'Let him

kiss me with the kisses of his mouth” (J.32,51). The bed symbolizes “the blending of human nature with the divine” (J.108,94); the night the “darkness of God’s presence” (J.181,130). Hear the murmur of the bridegroom’s voice.

Behold, you are fair, my companion, behold you are fair . . . By approaching my archetypal beauty, you have yourself become beautiful. Just like a mirror you have taken on my appearance . . . You have become beautiful by approaching my light; by drawing near to me, you have attained communion with my beauty . . . You are all fair, my companion, and there is no spot in you (J.104,92-3,139).

And the bride, who “recognizes the good fragrance of her spouse” (J.95,86) in her own perfume, responds:

My beloved is mine, and I am his . . . I knew him face to face, the one who exists from eternity . . . In him I rest and I am his dwelling (J.168,123).

Who would turn away from an ascent of such ecstasy?

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Texts

- Barrois, Georges, trans. *The Fathers Speak: St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nazianzus, St Gregory of Nyssa*. New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1986.
- Basil. *Basil: Letters and Select Works*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Vol. 8 of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1995.
- . *Saint Basil: Exegetic Homilies*. Translated by Agnes Way. Vol. 46 of The Fathers of the Church. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1963.
- . *Saint Basil: Letters*. Translated by Agnes Way. Vol. 13 of The Fathers of the Church. New York: Fathers of the Church, 1951.
- . *The Ascetic Works of Saint Basil*. Translated by W.K.L. Clarke. New York: Macmillan, 1925.
- Corrigan, Kevin, trans. *Reading Plotinus: a practical introduction to Neoplatonism*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, (forthcoming).
- Danielou, Jean and Herbert Musurillo, trans. *From Glory to Glory: Texts from Gregory of Nyssa's Mystical Writings*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961.
- Florovsky, Georges. *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*. Translated by Raymond Miller, Anne-Marie Dollinger-Labriolle, and Helmut Wilhelm Schmiedel. Vol. 10 of The Collected Works of Georges Florovsky. Vaduz, Europa: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987.
- Freeman, Kathleen, trans. *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.
- Gregory of Nyssa. *Gregory of Nyssa: Dogmatic Treatises, Etc*. Edited by Philip Schaff

- and Henry Wace. Vol. 5 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1995.
- . *Gregory of Nyssa: The Life of Moses*. Translated by Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson. New York: Paulist Press, 1978.
- . *Gregory of Nyssa's Treatise on the Inscriptions of the Psalms*. Translated by Ronald E. Heine. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- . *The Life of Saint Macrina*. Translated by Kevin Corrigan. Toronto: Peregina Publishing, 1996.
- . *Saint Gregory of Nyssa: Commentary on the Song of Songs*. Translated by Casimir McCambley. Brookline: Hellenic College Press, 1987.
- . *The Lord's Prayer; The Beatitudes*. Translated by Hilda C. Graef. Vol. 18 of *Ancient Christian Writers*. Westminster, MD: Newman Press, 1954.
- Gregory Nazianzus. *Cyril of Jerusalem, Gregory Nazianzen*. Edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Vol. 7 of *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, reprinted 1995.
- . *Gregory of Nazianzus Autobiographical Poems*. Translated by Carolinne White. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Plato. *The Republic and Other Works*. Translated by B. Jowett. New York: Doubleday, 1989.
- Plotinus. *Plotinus*. Translated by A.H. Armstrong. 7 Vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984.
- . *The Enneads*. Translated by Stephen MacKenna. New York: Larson Publications, 1992.

Select Secondary Texts

- Armstrong, A.H. *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy*. United States: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1989.
- . "Plotinus." Part 3 in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*. Edited by A.H. Armstrong. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.

- Balas, David L. *Metousia Theou: Man's Participation in God's Perfections According to Saint Gregory of Nyssa*. Rome: Pontificium Institutum S. Anselmi, 1966.
- Balme, Maurice, and Gilbert Lawall. *Athenaze: An Introduction to Ancient Greek*. Book 2, rev. ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.
- Brown, Hunter, et al., eds. *Images of the Human: The Philosophy of the Human Person in a Religious Context*. Chicago: Loyola Press, 1995.
- Chadwick, Henry. "Philosophical Tradition and the Self." In *Late Antiquity: a Guide to the Postclassical World*. Edited by G.W. Bowerstock, Peter Brown, and Oleg Grabar. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999.
- Clement, Olivier. "L'homme dans le monde." In *Verbum Caro* 12:45 (1958): 4-22.
- Coleridge, Samuel. *Biographia Literaria*. Ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate. Bollingen Series 75. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Daley, Brian E. "'Heavenly Man' and 'Eternal Christ': Apollinarius and Gregory of Nyssa on the Personal Identity of the Saviour." *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10:4 (2002): 469-488.
- . *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Dillard, Annie. *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*. New York: Harper & Row, 1974.
- Farmer, David. *Oxford Dictionary of Saints*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.
- Florovsky, Georges. *The Byzantine Ascetic and Spiritual Fathers*. Vaduz, Europa: Buchervertriebsanstalt, 1987.
- Frankfurt, Harry. "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person." In *Journal of Philosophy*, 68 (1971): 5-20.
- Gill, Christopher. *The Person and the Human Mind*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.
- Harrison, Verna E.F. *Grace and Human Freedom According to St. Gregory of Nyssa*. New York: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1992.
- Jaeger, Werner. *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*. Trans. Gilbert Highet. 3 Vols. New York: Oxford University Press, 1939-44.
- . *Two Rediscovered Works of Ancient Christian Literature: Gregory of Nyssa and Macarius*. Netherlands: E.J. Brill, 1965.

- Kelly, J.N.D. *Early Christian Doctrines*. USA: HarperSanFrancisco, 1978.
- Kennedy, George. *Greek Rhetoric under Christian Emperors*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Latta, Maureen. "Being Part of the 'Conscious Evolution'." *Wholife* 8 4 ((2002): 30.
- Leyser, Henrietta. *Hermits and the New Monasticism*. London: Macmillan, 1984.
- Liddell, H.G. and R. Scott. *An Intermediate Greek-English Lexicon*, 7th ed. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964.
- Lindbergh, Reeve. *Under A Wing*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998.
- Markus, R.A. "Marius Victorinus And Augustine." Part 5 in *The Cambridge History of Later Greek and Early Medieval Philosophy*. Edited by A.H. Armstrong. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967.
- Masson, Jeffrey Moussaieff. *The Emperor's Embrace*. New York: Pocket Books, 1999.
- Mercola, Joseph. "Visual Evidence of the Power of Prayer: Gratitude and Appreciation." May 2002, <<http://www.mercola.com/2002/may/8/prayer.html>> (29 March 2003).
- Meredith, Anthony. *The Cappadocians*. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995.
- Moore, Thomas. *Soul Mates: Honoring the Mysteries of Love and Relationship*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1994.
- Murphy, Margaret Gertrude. *St. Basil and Monasticism*. Washington DC: Catholic University of America, 1930.
- Nouwen, Henri. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. New York: Image Books, 1992.
- O'Daly, Gerard J. P. *Plotinus' Philosophy of the Self*. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1973.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Basic Questions in Theology: Collected Essays*. Trans. George H. Kehm. 3 Vols. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970-73.
- Pelikan, Jaroslav. *Christianity and Clasical Culture: The Metamorphosis of Natural Theology in the Christian Encounter with Hellenism*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Pourrat, Pierre. *Christian Spirituality*. Translated by W.H. Mitchell and S.P. Jacques. Westminster: Newman, 1953.

- Riso, Don Richard, and Russ Hudson. *The Wisdom of the Enneagram*. New York: Bantam Books, 1999.
- Rist, John. "Plotinus and Christian philosophy." In *The Cambridge Companion To Plotinus*. Edited by Lloyd P. Gerson. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Smith, Roff. *Cold Beer and Crocodiles: A Bicycle Journey into Australia*. Washington, DC: Adventure Press, 2000.
- Sylvia, Clair, and William Novak. *A Change of Heart: a memoir*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1997.
- von Balthasar, Hans Urs. *Presence and Thought: An Essay on the Religious Philosophy of Gregory of Nyssa*. Translated by Mark Sebanc. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1995.
- Warren, Mary Ann. *Moral Status: Obligations to Persons and Other Living Things*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Winslow, Donald F. *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979.
- Yannaras, Christos. *The Freedom of Morality*. Translated by Elizabeth Briere. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1996.
- Yancey, Philip. *Soul Survivor*. New York: Doubleday, 2001.
- Zizioulas, John D. *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*. Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1993.
- . "Human Capacity and Human Incapacity." *Scottish Journal of Theology* 28 (1972): 401-448.
- . "The Doctrine of the Holy Trinity: The Significance of the Cappadocian Contribution." In *Trinitarian Theology Today: Essays on Divine Being and Act*. Edited by Christoph Schwobel. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995.
- . "The Teaching of the Second Ecumenical Council on the Holy Spirit in Historical and Ecumenical Perspective." In *Credo in Spiritum Sanctum*. Vatican: Libreria Editria, 1983.